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"I Must Get Free"; A Student Cry to Address

Authentic Creativity in Secondary

Visual Arts Education

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“I Must Get Free”; A Student Cry to Address Authentic Creativity in Secondary Visual Arts Education

by

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This dissertation is respectfully dedicated to the memory of

Dr. Oscar Mink

in gratitude for his support and interest in this study
and his contagious passion for life.

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“I Must Get Free”; A Student Cry to Address Authentic Creativity in Secondary Visual Arts Education

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This qualitative autobiographical study examined the learning environment of advanced secondary visual arts students involved in an experiment in which their artistic development transpired within a program of study of their own design and management. The study recognized changes in learning perspectives of the participants in the study, changes in the educational setting, and changes in the role of the teacher/researcher in that setting. Additionally, this study examined and questioned conventional applications of learning in art education and whether or not teacher-centered pedagogical approaches in art education deny learners holistic choices and understandings. This study also examined a contemporary philosophical appreciation of what actually constitutes a work of art and how an object achieves candidacy as a work of art. Further, the study examined the capabilities of high school art students to understand aesthetics in visual arts and to comprehend a

philosophical concept of how aesthetic influences and perceptions may be directed toward what our culture considers art, the creation of and response to art, the standards for judging art's significance, and for interpreting its meaning in a secondary art educational setting. The study not only explored but promoted a need for further research in enhanced gifted education, the didactic concept of authentic creativity, self-directed learning, community supported learning, ownership of intellectual property, and the idea that self-esteem is an effect rather than cause for high-achievement.

The study examined a nine-month experiment in which eight high school students enrolled in an advanced studio art course were given the opportunity to design their own course of study with their own curricular rationales, objectives, and goals. The experiment provided data in which conventional art education methodologies were questioned, as well as instructive reliability/learner responsiveness in a teacher-centered curriculum. Further, this study documented and examined changes in the human ecology of the educational setting in which the experiment was conducted, and analyzed pedagogical modifications for a student/teacher co-developmental learning environment.

Data were collected from interviews, participant and researcher journals in which personal thoughts, ideas, and experiences concerning the experiment were documented, as well as the collection and analyses of artworks completed during the experiment.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND PROVISIONS OF THE STUDY

In art, no one is entitled to disregard the truth.

- Edgar Degas

Introduction

This qualitative action-research study (1) examines the learning environment of advanced secondary visual arts students involved in an experiment in which their artistic development transpires within a program of study of their own design and management; (2) examines and recognizes changes in learning perspectives of the participants in the study, any changes in the educational environment, and any changes with the role of the teacher in that environment and experiment; (3) explores traditional versus progressive applications of learning in secondary art education and questions whether or not teacher centered pedagogy denies students holistic choices and understanding; (4) examines and challenges a philosophical understanding of what actually constitutes a work of art and how an object achieves candidacy as a work of art; (5) explores some aspects of enhanced gifted education, authentic creativity; and, (6) discusses self-directed learning, the influences of community supported learning and the subsequent affects of self-esteem.

The study also interprets journal entries of both the author and the participants of the study, as well as interviews conducted during and after the experiment with those participants. In addition, the study includes descriptive analyses of the participant/student artist's individual works and portfolios.

Statement of the Problem

> The system of schooling which occupies ten or more years of education for the majority of children and youth in each society does great good for some and may be very damaging for others. It offers all an opportunity to learn….but does so on its own terms.
>
> -Benjamin Bloom

Advanced secondary studio art students at the high school where I taught were not motivated to produce work exhibiting any intrinsic basis or cause. Frankly, they were not expressing the frustrations and failures of learning as developing artists, an indication that they were operating only within personally perceived and comfortable limitations. The students were expected merely to imitate the mechanical movements of predetermined and cyclical tasks of the past. Students displayed little or no scholarly, aesthetic, emotional understanding; or personal involvement in rendering their work. Revealing teacher/student discussions relating to artist's intention, creativity, and artistic ownership led to an assessment which required reflection on what students should learn if they are to be called artistically educated, as well as speculation on how and when to determine human potential for fulfillment. In a field that embodies individual sentiment, opinion, and passion, an analysis of the advanced art program, one that I designed years earlier, revealed an educational setting for a particular group of students that seemingly was not much more than an intellectual wasteland, one in which the features and attributes of humanness were never addressed or questioned as subject matter or artistic themes. In areas of specializations such as visual arts studies, such considerations cannot be avoided and

we educators are required to consider the not so simple duty of determining what are we to teach, and how are we to teach it (Foshay, 2000). The answer may not be evident, but an attempt to answer the question is already to philosophize and to begin to educate (Bloom, 1987). Further, such a question in itself poses a question of human connectiveness.

Is it irresponsible to insist that everyone must be allowed to develop freely, or authoritarian to impose a point of view on the student? In providing a proper learning environment, then educators must try to determine what atmosphere…one in which the crudeness and earthiness of the world outside the classroom are addressed and prosper within it, or, on the other hand, to impose such a restricted and illiberal requirement on the student that a disciplined program of study is seen as one in which authoritative demands take away possible innovative self-expression and either restricts or eliminates prospective unifying thought between the student, subject, and teacher. The educational environment should provide some vision of what an educated human being is. The program should provide intimations that real mysteries might be revealed, that new and higher motives of action might be discovered within, and that a different and more human way of life can be harmoniously constructed by what is learned. The artwork of the advanced art program that I taught was always about an end, never about a means to further understanding of self or the other.

It was during an impromptu discussion with a student concerning artistic intention and ownership of work that led me to the possibility of researching student directed learning. The discussion subsequently revealed personal hegemonic pedagogical

tendencies and curricular inconsistencies within the advanced studio art education setting. As a result, the educational setting within which I taught became a field ripe for the study of an educational situation in which traditional learning and teaching practices could be compared to those which could be understood as progressive. Advanced students, some in their 4th year of studio art, were merely replicating projects of the previous years, working mostly on mechanical skills. Any personal work was completed outside the classroom. Students had lost interest and some were dropping out of the program. At least to some degree, regardless of how minimal, this study is meant to determine why.

The Purpose of this Study

This study explores the curricular impact in the field of visual arts studies resulting from pedagogical changes from a teacher-centered system of instruction (one in which outcomes yield seemingly predetermined and predictable results) to one embracing an emphasis upon student-centered development, learning community involvement, and student ownership of learning in a constructivist, indeterministic system of learning (one in which outcomes yield undetermined and unpredictable results). A major concern of this study was to examine and explore how philosophical changes in pedagogy may or may not alter and affect student learning.

This study documents how student perspectives toward learning change during an experiment in which students are allowed to direct and develop their own program of study designed to meet essential objectives and specific goals. This study

documents and examines possible changes in the atmospheric environment and the human ecology of the students' educational setting while meeting those goals, which would include any outward pedagogical adjustments or any resulting co-development of student and teacher. Also, the study explores and examines any possible formation or apparent existence of a subsequent sub-culture or community in which human interaction apart from the instructor becomes a staple methodology for those involved in the study. Further, because the character of this study is action-research, any changes in personal perspectives of pedagogy and learning were examined. For instance, when considering the conversations of artistic intent and ownership within a secondary educational setting for advanced studio art students an inspection of hegemonic tendencies that may include methodological control of the classroom environmental meant to produce predestined and predictable results and managing an educational setting in which I represented the *first cause* for student work will be conducted.

This study critically examines the students' own perspectives of autonomy emphasizing the role of students as agents of their own developmental learning. The study examines and explores the autonomy of high school students as being independent with the will to learn, while having an awareness of the learning process and the ability to make critical personal judgments and decisions, while exploring the abilities of students of testing self in matters of will, commitment, persistence, and diligence. The study places an emphasis upon student choice and will examine the following question, which represents the purpose of this study: When given the

opportunity to design, direct, and develop their own program of study, how will the learning perspectives of qualified advanced studio art students in a secondary educational setting, once given the proper and appropriate objectives, rationales, and goals, be modified or altered, if at all, when compared to the curricular and scholarly developmental expectations of an existing, formalized, and predetermined visual arts curriculum?

In answering the question, the following particular issues are considered which may cause a reassessment of the processes of creativity, learning, and arts appreciation:

(1) - What changes occur in the student/teacher relationship; that is, did the study provide data regarding potential enhancement or deficiencies of teacher influence in the educational; or, did the study present information concerning mutual influence in student/teacher interaction, a counter-intuitive "togetherness-in-separation" concept?

(2) - Did those changes, if any, lead to new insights or revisions within the existing curriculum and/or personal pedagogical practice?

(3) - Did periods of confusion and unresolved tension subsist in student/teacher relationships, which in turn affect artistic development?

(4) - Did moments of new synthesis and understanding reveal student capabilities for satisfactory explanations of new insights concerning personal development, as well as curricular rationale and purpose?

(5) - Did a continuing wresting of artistic issues concerning communicative and mechanical skills, concepts, and aesthetic understandings pervade student development with perpetually unresolved problems?

(6) - Did or how did student work yield predictable or unpredictable results, and how did those results promote an increase or decrease in learning?

(7) - How much of an understanding of aesthetics did students possess?

(8) - Was student learning a direct reflection of teacher limitations of knowledge and skill level? Or, how much of student learning was under the direct influence of the teacher in studio art, and was the end result justified by the means?

(9) - To what degree did environmental conditions affect learning within the classroom and how will those conditions change, if at all, when students were given opportunities to participate in the design of their own programs of study?

(10) - How did student perspectives on learning and analytical decisions and judgments change when given the opportunity to design their own program of study?

(11) - What changes occurred in student learning/creativity with unpredictable curriculum when compared to standardized predictable learning format?

Assumptions

This study depended on the following assumptions:

1. A philosophical understanding, perception, and judgment of artistic intent, aesthetic interest, and artistic ownership is within the capabilities of many qualified advanced secondary art students.

2. Different types of classroom tasks will require students to use different learning strategies.
3. Environmental learning conditions have a direct affect, positively and/or negatively, on learning for gifted students.
4. Respectful teachers believe that students can match them in hunger after knowledge, that they can learn what they wish to, and that they need to make learning their own. Respect and the need for respect, however, does not assume that teachers and students are equals and teachers should not treat students as equals in all things; teachers know things students do not. Still, students can possess remarkable capacities of understanding and creativity. Obviously unequal in attainments, students are reminded and embrace the notion of equality in pursuit and reverence for learning and finding the truth (Woodruff, 2001).
5. The ontological, espistemological, and methodological aspects of the study fell under interpretivist/constructivist, critical, deconstructivist or postmodernistic, and positivist theoretical perspectives/paradigms. However, the learning perspectives of most if not all of the participants in the study prior to the experiment fall under a positivist paradigm (Lather, 1996; Habernas, 1975):
    - Interpretivist/Constructivist Paradigm. The ontological construction of the reality of the study comes through human interaction yielding in return multiple realities. Espistemological understandings of individual participants of the study come through meanings established through social constructions with others in the study. The methodologies utilized

in the study include observations, interviews and is an emergent design in which participants help structure the inquiry. Meaning is made through social construction. The participants of the study, as well as myself, operated in a hermeneutical process of understanding the meaning of the work completed during the experiment.

- Critical Paradigm. Multiple realities are constructed, some more dominant than others, which may promote inequities and inquiry. Any attempts to understand social construction come through symbolic representation, but understands that knowledge of a dominant culture is promoted and other forms of knowledge are obscured. Methodologies include observations and interviews, which raise questions to heighten awareness of injustices and begin a change process. The participants of the study undertook indigenous methodologies in which they researched themselves on their own. Learning is realized through theory and action on that theory.
- Postmodernistic paradigm. Idealistic in nature with a tolerance for deliberate ambiguity, participants complicated the study to reveal how the history of the program shaped how they learned.
- Positivist paradigm. Realities can be quantified, measured, and categorized. Reality consists of facts and the right methods can be used to discover the truth (the truth is in the objective, which merely needs to be

discovered). Knowledge is obtained through testing and confirming a hypothesis.

Limitations of the Study

Generalizations made from the results this study are limited by its design. In considering the concept of generalization, we must consider that were we literally confined to particulars, we would be unable to reason. The very nature of reasoning is the passage from what is given to what is not directly given. In others words, we infer that an event will take place because of a preceding event. To understand the study, however, one may interpret the analyses and interpretations offered of the given information as yielding unpredictable data rather than relying upon the logical reasoning of predictable expectations. Further, an attempt to understand the study requires and depends upon relationships and associations with separate events that may be perceived as duplicitous, and universally may not be capable of universal duplication (Sellars, 1917). The outcome of this study is founded firmly in the knowledge that a standardized method of instruction is purged for the sake of this research. The methods employed and results realized by the participants of the experiment are not anticipatory. Additional limitations of the study lie in its multi-layered and complex nature conducted in a short period of time.

Science, indeed traditional standards of education, as I understand them, depends upon all the processes by means of which facts are gathered, analyzed, and interpreted. Such collection of data involves selection, and processes of comparison

and analysis facilitate this selection. The purpose is to eliminate the irrelevant and accidental and to center attention on the important and the essential. Whatever aids in this task is of primary importance for systematic inference. Only after surface appearances are passed and the irrelevant and confusing circumstances are eliminated can the problem be defined and its probable answer suggested. Impossible prior to and even after the experiment, an analysis by comparison and experimentation as a pre-condition of explanatory conceptions was not available for this study, such as allowing a group of advanced high school art students design for the first time in their lives or in the history of the program of the school they attend their own course of study.

The determination of what is important and relevant for this study is no easy matter considering the fact that the outgrowth of the study had no prior knowledge. Of course, every problem, in this case one dealing with issues such as artistic intent, requires a more or less special method and technique, and these reflect the ideas, which are in the mind of the researcher. Common sense and intuitive thinking does not necessarily lend itself to rules of quantitative science. The strength of scientific discovery rests on the development of the methods and the techniques that accompany them. As far as I knew when the classroom experiment began, I very well could have come to realize soon enough that I was being guided by a false conception. Logic may be the science of proof or evidence, retrospective and probative, but logical thinking does not necessarily offer a sanctified road to discovery (Sellars, p.13). It can only support the teacher in making others conscious

of the best methods and ideas, and offer warnings against dangers of being too hurried and rigid, guarding against hasty conclusions. The fact is, this study is unequivocally qualitative in nature.

In light of these thoughts, the following should be considered as potential limitations to the study:

1. The use of a self-report instrument to determine, validate, or evaluate self-directed learner capability depends totally upon the accuracy and honesty of the respondents' replies. The qualitative interpretations of the work completed by the self-directed learners and the methodologies in creating the work should be confined mainly to a likelihood that the data generated by the participants of the experiment has been correctly reported, as well as the importance of the data to the participants (Myers,1962).
2. The lack of absolute control over time related variables that might influence authentic assessment of self-directed learners' classroom tasks.
3. Student participants of the study came from one high school, enrolled in an advanced studio art program with at least two years (most with three) of secondary art experience and instruction, and all participants had submitted portfolios to the College Board as participants in the Advanced Placement Studio Art program at the same school during their previous year of schooling.

Conclusion

This qualitative study: (1) examines the learning environment of secondary visual arts students involved in an experiment in which their artistic development transpires within a program of study of their own design and management; (2) examines and recognizes changes in learning perspectives of the participants in the study, any changes in the educational environment, and any changes with the role of the teacher in that environment during the experiment; (3) explores traditional versus progressive applications of learning in secondary art education and questions whether or not teacher-centered pedagogical practices deny students holistic choices and understanding; (4) examines and challenges a philosophical understanding of what actually constitutes a work of art and how an object achieves candidacy as a work of art; (5) explores some aspects of enhanced gifted education, authentic creativity; and, (6) discusses self-directed learning, the influences of community-supported learning and the subsequent affects on self-esteem. This study also interprets journal entries of both the author and the participants of the study. Additionally, this study includes descriptive analyses of the participant/student artist's individual works and portfolios. This study is autobiographical in nature.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The study of art must be holistic. To understand the work fully, one must also study the artist, the context within which the work was rendered, the content of the work, and the viewer of the work. This qualitative autobiographical study explores the curricular and pedagogical impact of one involved as a practitioner in the field of visual arts studies, who is emerging from a teacher-centered, behaviorist, and deterministic pedagogical system - one in which outcomes were predetermined and predictable - to one which embraces an emphasis upon student-centered development. A major concern of this study addresses community involvement and student ownership of learning in a constructivist, indeterministic system of learning which in turn yields unpredictable outcomes and questioned the very structure, and ultimately, the ontological foundation (the truth) of the very system under which my students and I operated.

This study documents how student perspectives toward learning changed during an experiment in which a group of students were allowed to direct their own programs of study. Further, changes in the atmospheric environment and the human ecology in which students learned, the pedagogical adjustments, the resulting co-development of student and teacher, and how the subsequent emergence of a learning

community in which human interaction became a staple methodology for those involved in the study.

This study analyzed autonomy in self-directed learning in a visual arts educational setting, teacher-learner relationships, how far or how personal those relationships should become and how those relationships affect learning activities. From the outset of the experiment, I was not totally comfortable with some of the terminology most closely associated with my study that help describe the experiment. Self-directed learning, for instance, is closely associated with the study and commonly relates to (but not always) out of the classroom home schooling, or adult education. My study is associated directly with secondary education within an educational high school environment. Much of what occurred in the study came as a result of self-directed learning. I have even referred to the students as directing their own program of study many times. Student or Self-*Developed* Learning seems to me, however, to be a more appropriate phrase regarding the experiment. The students were bright, gifted, and talented, to be sure, but they developed more than they directed. Nevertheless, they were teenagers, which had suddenly been given an enormous task to complete that which gifted adults would find challenging. I was always in close proximity and assured them that their voluntary participation in the experiment could end at any time. None of them quit the experiment.

In practical reality, they were their *own* developers of their own programs of study…allowed to succeed with their own decisions and planning, as well as to suffer their own consequences of failure. In view of that, the subsequent study of the

experiment critically examines the students' own perspectives of autonomy emphasizing the role of students as agents of their own developmental learning. The study defines autonomy as being independent with the will to learn, having an awareness of the learning process, and the ability to make critical judgments. It is a study about student choice.

The examination and observation of the students during the experiment details a my personal development from being aesthetically latent to or toward personal fulfillment, receiving counsel and advising from the teacher, but not the teacher's direct management or supervision. The students became commanders of their own personal expansion and enlargement, growth and strengthening. They improved their personal understanding of aesthetic quality and artistic refinement on their own terms, which in turn enabled them to become more complex and intricate with their thinking skills, being able to develop the premise of their individualized work with more imagination. Thus, they were able to articulate those ideas with others. They became their own investigators, walking their own paths of discovery while the others where always close by. Quite frankly, they matured as young adults, as analytical developing artists, and as theorist. Their thinking skills improved, advanced, and expanded to a point which rivaled, then surpassed my own. Within 6 to 8 weeks of the beginning of the experiment, their work was of such a high quality, it became I confess, a bit of an embarrassment to me. They became self-sufficient, and had become authentic self-developed learners. Apparent within 4 months after the beginning of the experiment was that my presence in their lives as an art instructor

was no longer central or necessary to their artistic progress. In that respect alone, the experiment was a success.

For myself, this autobiographical dissertation is an example of risking behaviors associated with postmodernistic and/or constructivist research. Emphasizing the initiatory functions that writing, revising, and defending a dissertation serve, I take the dissertation as a risk-taking adventure toward a professional identity document. As such, risk taking can recreate the metaphorical space required of the dissertation for establishing professional identities. Also, aspects of the autobiography I discuss are the value of shared stories, an alternative mirror, and as ethnography.

This dissertation includes some excerpts from my own journals, student journals, examples of student artwork, and notations from interviews. The study documents a realization of my failure as a teacher, the realizations and subsequent liberations for both my students and myself, free from an extremely powerful modernistic, deterministic, behaviorist, hegemonic, and standardized educational system. Also, the study documents the power and necessity of dialogue, inquiry, human interaction, and community in an educational setting. This story documents and compares outcomes which were once predictable and unsurprising, to that which became unpredictable, with volatile, impulsive, and perhaps, reckless outcomes, much of which, I am convinced, were completed by my students in an effort of purposely violating the system under which they had previously operated. Furthermore, the story documents how gifted students were allowed to be gifted, and for the first time in their artistic education of claiming authentic and genuine ownership of their work.

It also examines the personal dilemmas of watching my students fail in their attempt to manage time, waiver with their own beliefs, doubt the worthiness of their work, and understand the pain of learning. It is a story of risk and obstacle, not only from the students' perspective, but certainly from my own, as well. The dissertation is a story of placing theory into practice, relinquishing a teacher-controlled ecology in the classroom.

It is an important emphasis in much of my own thoughts as a teacher about the experiment which allows for the creation of a program that acknowledged bringing a world into existence where I had imposed self-limiting power by allowing the others to truly be themselves. As I painfully have learned, the gift of love must always be the give of freedom, the gift of a measure of letting-be to the extent that is appropriate to their character. Risks were always present during the experiment. Because I stood back, metaphysical room was made for those within the world created. It is an understood world of being the inescapable mixed consequence of a world allowed by its creator to explore and realize, in its own way, its own inherent fruitfulness – to make itself (Polkinghorne, 1998).

That we wrestle with the problems of pain and suffering, as apparent by the word and the work of the participants of the study, reveals to us that the cold methodical story of a world, or an environment, or a study, or a program emphasizing mechanical know-how, is far from sufficient to satisfy our human longing to understand and to make sense of the world in which we live. Questions of meaning and justice by a teenager cannot be removed from our human agenda. Their thoughts, all of our

thoughts, far exceed an impersonal evaluation of objective superficial skills merely developed to make a nice drawing. In fact there seems to be a principle of mutual segregation between what can be established beyond an uncertainty or doubt and what is of real significance for the gain of understanding. The axiomatic system of study created by the participants of the study, apparent by the evidence of their creations, their writings, and their community involvement, indeed, their experimentations in seeking the truth of their personal development as an artist, and as a human being, displayed a system which involved acts of intellectual daring. The ontological program under which I operated prior to the experiment of seeking to find authentic and new knowledge on the basis of clearly mechanical and superficial ideas has proved to be an unattainable ideal (Polkinghorne, p.14).

Discussion of Artistic Intent

Philosophers have been bewildered about art as long as philosophy has existed. Developments in contemporary arts have deepened their bewilderment. Art generally strove accurately to represent what it depicted. With the invention of the camera, however, came a distorted representation, especially in painting. Late nineteenth and early twentieth century painters became more concerned with conveying artist's anguish. Further, with the arrival of abstract and conceptual art any remaining traditional approaches to understanding art were laid to rest (Wartenberg, 2001). These developments help to explain why the twentieth century has provided such rich discussions in the philosophy of art. Prior to that period of time, not even a concept

of art resembled our own. Art, as we understand it, was not distinguished from its earlier meaning of an activity requiring specialized skill. The philosophical discussions about the modern art movements beginning in the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries reveal an intensity of puzzlement.

Derisive comments reflecting deep suspicions of contemporary visual are common among visitors walking through museums. For those who wish the arts to address contemporary concerns, current developments in art are a source of deep anxiety. This study certainly will not put those anxieties to rest, but merely explore the curriculum in a secondary advanced visual art educational setting to further understand why the arts are such a troubling presence in our world. Many scholars and art educators concerned with the social functions of art will continue to ask whether the arts in our time function to challenge or to support social and cultural issues such as the objectivity of women, war, pop cultural influences, politics, violence, or love…and, will continue to investigate how changes in the production and dissemination of art affect their meaning (Wartenberg, p. xxii). Has art's cultural influence been undermined by technology? Does art prop up a dominant social order? Has art continued to play a socially and culturally subversive role? With these thoughts in mind, a central question for art educators concerning the philosophy of art is raised and becomes the catalyst for this study: What makes something a work of art?

During an individual critique and discussion with a senior advanced art student, a question was raised about genuine personal ownership of art, which led to an attempt

to identify how an object is accepted into the world of art as a legitimate work of art, and then the question of what makes an object a work of art. Research reveals that five ingredients are needed for an object to qualify as a work of art, or at least a candidate for a work of art. The findings were not definitive, but provided a channel of communication between the student and myself that became the starting point for this research. In the discussion, the five components were argued as essentials for an object entering the art world are: (1) a human being as artist; (2) the object itself made or found by the artist; (3) an artistic or aesthetic interest in the object by the artist; (4) an intent by the artist of placing the object in a position of being a candidate for art by placing the object in a position of being evaluated by a social institution; and (5) a social institution to evaluate the object (e.g., Collingwood, 1934; Danto, 1964; Dickie, 1974; Beardsley, 1984; Wartenberg, 2001). It was item #4 that led the student to remark that I had, as her teacher, had not allowed for personal artistic intent in the educational setting, and that her work, shown to many in a various locations outside the classroom, actually did not qualify as her art, or art at all. The work she had previously rendered was, she claimed, with my intention…the idea, the methods, the explanations and reasons, and the exhibiting of the work were owned not by her, but by me.

A common criticism of education in the visual arts is that its system of beliefs is unchanging (the elements of art and principles of design among other ideologies), while philosophies of art, new knowledge and discoveries of new materials and their uses are always in persistent growth. Said another way, art education was about

seeking results, not answers. Hence, to skeptics of visual arts education, art educators seem to be always engaged in the hopeless task of trying to force the new knowledge into molds, which it has outgrown. I think this feeling alienates the outsider much more than any particular discrepancies between this or that doctrine and this or that curriculum or instructional theory. We may overcome isolated 'difficulties' (for instance, with digital technology and the question about who is the artist…the computer program or the operator of the computer program?), but that does not alter their sense that an artistic endeavor as a whole is doomed to failure and is obstinate: indeed, the more ingenious, the more perverse and distant from foundational standards. For it seems clear that, if the predecessors in art education had known what we know about our current postmodernistic culture, formalistic and traditional training in the arts might never have existed at all: and, however we patch and mend, no system of thought which claims to be immutable can, in the long run, adjust itself to growing knowledge. How can an unchanging system, or one unwilling to change, survive the continual increase of knowledge (Lewis, 1970)? And, is change necessarily equal to progress?

Change in curricula is not progress unless the core concept remains unchanged. In other words, wherever there is real progress in knowledge, there is some knowledge that is not superseded. Indeed, the very possibility of progress demands that there should be an unchanging element. Put another way, the constructive sequential declarations made by the teaching of formalism, a modernistic pedagogical approach, have the power, elsewhere found chiefly in the recognized elements and principles of

art, of receiving, without inherent change, the increasing complexity of meaning, a postmodernistic pedagogical approach, which increasing knowledge puts into them. That, indeed, would represent growth. Why is it, then, that our current system of visual arts studies at the K-12 or even the college level does not formally embrace and incorporate a postmodernistic approach into its program of study?

Often, in the past, the educational system inadvertently communicated that the arts relate to emotions rather than to intellect and one did not need to know anything about art to understand it (Rice, 1991). However, according to Radford (1992) just looking at art is a complex, culturally loaded act, as art does more than merely describe "concrete objects or events" (p.57). He acknowledges that while much art is representational, it also is concerned with the response of the viewer and the artist, feelings and ideas, and personal elements of the experience. Art asks us to participate in a communication process. In so doing, it may be used to transform the viewer, to communicate ideas, and to provide deeper and wider frames of reference. Art gives insight and shape to human experience, helping to inform our responses and actions. Art can provide an experience or spirit of communion between the artist, the work itself, and the viewer. The communion experience of the viewer need not be a worship experience in a religious sense, but perhaps transcendental, nonetheless. I certainly embrace the idea of potentially having a sense or spirit of communion when looking at a painting, attending a symphonic concert or dramatic production and that the audience or viewer voluntarily is placed in a position of acceptance to what they are attending, allowing themselves to receive the message of the artist, which in turn,

I believe, is at least closely associated with a religious experience. Thus, art can be used to inform and persuade in different ways and may be directed at different audiences. Especially in the art of recent years, these capacities have become more open (perhaps confusing) with the result that most viewers of contemporary art find themselves challenged to question and think about such things as morals, values, and other social issues in addition to the very nature of art (Wolcott, 1997). In this respect, as educators we need to design curricula focused on helping students develop their abilities both to create and to understand meaning in their own works of art and in that of others. In doing so, we need to provide students with the skills and abilities necessary to interpret, analyze, and evaluate art. In addition to these responsibilities educators need to make art more relevant to students - that is, we must strive to bring the art world and the student's world together for better understanding. Contemporary art can, with the help of knowledgeable art educators, assist students in understanding our changing society (p. 47).

I suspect that most educators in the visual arts were formally educated with modernistic ideologies and continue to ground their ontological and epistemological ideas about art, including appropriate pedagogy, within the modernist paradigm. Not surprisingly, the classes they teach are shaped by *their* understanding of what art is (Dewey, 1902), or that they might feel threatened by the kind of inquiry that goes on in other classrooms or at schools that embrace a more progressive approach to teaching. We are, quite simply, no longer in a traditional industrial age (Borland, 2003). The realization coupled with the troublesome notion of what progressivism

means for teaching art places them, and the rest of us, on the horns of a plurality of dilemmas (McRorie, 1997). Because so much art making relies upon a range of interrelated theories and philosophies, it is not enough that art students know how to make formally (modernistic) acceptable objects. The postmodern world in which we live is no longer strictly a formally based phenomenon. Progressive postmodern art deals with economic, political, and social experiences as well as aesthetic, psychological, ethical, historical, and institutional ones (p.104). The postmodern era has brought with it an increased awareness of mediating reality through communication.

To better understand the context in this study was conducted, it is helpful to discuss distinctions between modernism (traditional/foundational/industrial age) to today's postmodern complex culture of uncertainty (Jones, 1998).

Modernism may now be dangerously close if not completely an abandoned notion of the past which means, of course, at the present we are or are becoming postmodern (McRorie, 1997). The difference between modern and postmodern, however, is far more apparent within the galleries and art journals and in the conversations of artists than it is within the postsecondary classrooms and studios where there is a superficial effort to educate, train, and prepare future artists and/or teachers of art. The world of art has and is changing but there remains, within the academic world of art, an insensitivity, an ignorance, or a refusal to let our instruction be sufficiently informed by the practice of the professional world beyond art studio walls (Jones, 1997).

Modernism

To best understand postmodernism, the question of what defines modernism must be addressed. As it relates to visual arts studies, then, what is modernism? What seems to be at the very soul of modernism is its internalization, its insistence upon being what Donald Kuspit calls "introspective" (1988, p.82). In other words, modernistic art has a preoccupation with itself, with form (its own form), and medium. It searches for, confirms and establishes its own parameters as described by its own inwardness. Stated in simple terms, "modernistic art is all about itself and in its extreme and most idealistic sense about nothing else but form" (Jones, 1999, p.92).

The circumstance of modernism has been described as one where the artist becomes an expert in a self-absorbed, non-centered world out of the main stream of larger cultural consideration, split off from realities and responsibilities of everyday communication (Risatti, 1990). Modernistic artists can be thought of as isolated, as alone, and making art that is about itself and that it does not care about anything or anyone else. "Modernistic thinking in art seems to have little to do with life in the street" (Godfrey, 1986, p.9). Thus, this negative condition of formalism and modernism, this off-centeredness, leads the artist to an unknowingly separatist, isolationist stance where the sky could be falling with neither the artist's knowledge nor concern.

A philosophical definition of a modernistic approach to art (formalism) has transformed art into a non-contextual, un-centered human activity, which in turn is disagreeable with a perception of superiority. Modernism formed by the simple

preoccupation with itself…internalization. Above all else, modernism concerns itself with the essence of making art and to concern itself with the character of the medium. As Jones states, "modern artists are not concerned with their art having a message or a point to it; rather, modern artists want their art to look good, to cause visual pleasure. For well over a century now we have grown accustomed to exercises in color, line, space, and edge as being not only legitimate but profoundly and aesthetically essential adventures for artists and viewers alike, and that modernists have come to accept isolation and the subsequent 'impersonalness' as co-requisites for both the making of as well as the experiencing of art" (1997, p.93).

Educating the Modernist

Modernism believes in scientific objectivity; its art has the logic of structure and the logic of material. It longs for perfection and demands purity, clarity, and order. Like technology, it is based on the invention of man-made forms, or as Meyer Shapiro has said, "a thing made rather than a scene represented"(1979, p.90). Modernist embrace the belief that humanism's quest for order through the adoption of formalism is the primary method of understanding art (Clark, 1996). It is in the compositional elements of art (color, line, shape, texture, and value) and in the formulaic principles of design (balance, contrast, rhythm, emphasis, variety, proportion, and movement) through which modernism promotes the idea that formalism is not only universal, but also a common framework within which art *ought* to be expressed.

In the past, because modernism emphasized the superiority of form over content, artists looked inward for creative inspiration. Self-expression becomes an end unto itself, devoid of any other social function:

> For Dewey, the essence of art was not in the product or the artifact, but in the act of experiencing through creation and the artist's (and viewer's) perception… According to Beardsley, art was to be enjoyed intrinsically (p.5).

Modernism once revealed a gap between modernist art and the general public. First, a distinguishing feature of high modernism was its disdain for any form of popular art. New styles were continually being sought by modern artists to keep them aesthetically distanced from the common citizen. Secondly, the absence of traditional representational subject matter made it difficult for the general public to understand modernistic art.

Modernists more typically respond to charges of elitism by evoking claims to equality, democracy, excellence, and class mobility:

> The true apostles of equality are those who take for granted that the only ideal for a democratic society is one that prizes excellence and the pursuit of the best possible self, an ideal that far from being elitist in any maleficent sense is one that wants for the large majority what heretofore has been the privilege of the minority (Smith, 1992a, p.72).

However, the evangelistic zeal contained within such declarations has not deterred postmodernists from pointing out that "the best possible self" alluded to is invariably White and male (Clark, 1999).

So, what about modernism and how has it invaded and attached itself to visual arts studies? It certainly goes without saying that virtually everyone holding an

undergraduate degree in the visual arts has a full and first-hand understanding of the nature of visual arts education, in secondary and in postsecondary settings. I feel comfortable in holding the notion that we also know the nature of visual arts education for the previous generation. If any group has so rigorously proved the saying that we teach as we have been taught, it is the body of teachers and instructors of art (Jones, p.93); an assilimilation of modernism has permeated throughout and has been perpetuated through the courses which have been taught. It would be an understatement to declare that art instructors are bound together by their belief in modernism, their comfort in modernistic modeled pedagogical behavior, and their resistance to or lack of awareness of a transforming world of art.

Interestingly, with an examination of contemporary art texts, one has difficulty in finding a relationship between the exercises in the texts and what is happening within our world. For instance, despite my own pleas for the addition of more intrinsically oriented articles and lessons for a supplement of a major art text, one of which I co-authored (*Advance Studio Activities,* 2000), the editors were not interested in philosophical discussions which raised issues of artistic inquiry within the viewer or the artist. Proclaimed the editor, "…such a text was simply not marketable in our context." As Risatti puts it, "form and formal elements in art were elevated to the positions of universals that transcended any historical, cultural, or ethnic considerations (1990, pp.9-10)."

With the 1980s, came a very felt and dramatic change in both the visual and philosophical nature of art. Contemporary art has become surprisingly

representational, clearly narrative and content driven, and, most importantly, irreverent to what the 20th century has held to be of formalistic importance.

Postmodernism

> A paradox of postmodernism – and perhaps its primary virtue – is that its ambivalence is deliberate. The notion of Truth is replaced with that of purposeful uncertainty.
>
> Dennis Fehr

Postmodernism's popularity derives from its deliberate ambivalence and communicative elasticity: It can complicate or facilitate meaning. Referring to postmodernism in a conversation can allow individuals to appear profound without actually saying anything of real substance; alternatively, citing postmodernism can help groups find commonality within diversity. Postmodernism can suggest only what it is not rather than what it is. It has spawned an array of specialized terms such as deconstruction, reconstruction, and post-structuralism making postmodernism as a whole difficult to discuss. Postmodernist theories do not always offer definitive departures from modernist principles. Feminist theorists, in particular, may speak from perspectives that are modernist, postmodernist, or somewhere in between. An example of this transitional quality in the field of art education is the continuing debate as to whether or not discipline-based art education (DBAE) is essentially modernist or postmodernist (Clark, 1999).

The elasticity of postmodernism can be traced to its transcendent, and transitional characteristic. Its deliberate ambivalence can be explained in terms of recent

paradigmatic movements away from objectivity and universality. Within the theory and practice of contemporary art these movements have produced a new sense of meaning, connection, doubt, and perspective (Sullivan, 1993). The sense of meaning within art has moved away from the modernist emphasis upon form toward issues of content, issues which frequently involve the concept of power – its source, exercise, and consequence. Now, artistic meaning is seen as a socially constructed (not individually as with the modernist) entity, requiring the viewer to look beyond the formalist compositional qualities of a work. Modernist theories which explained social interaction in terms of opposing binary poles (male/female, capitalist/socialist, conservative/liberal) have been replaced by connective models that better reflect the multifaceted and multicultural nature of human existence. In art, this new sense of connectivity has resulted in a rejection of the subject/object relationships that have historically existed between artist/model and art/viewer (Clark, 1999).

The sense of doubt that undermines much of postmodernists theory stands in stark contrast to modernism's assumption of evitable progress…progress itself is questioned to the point that if the world as we see it today represents the best we can expect, then something is seriously wrong (Sullivan, 1993). With postmodernism, trends in art no longer take their cue from the forward-thinking but from the active forces unleashed within our corporate and technology driven culture. Inspiration, originality, and purity of form are out; appropriation, collage, and juxtaposition of meanings are in (Clark, 1999).

I wonder if is it safe to ask, as a world, if we have become at odds not with what was, but what we are? I suspect that we will always be at odds with what we are, and forever different as a result of all that is happening in the world. The parallel we have witnessed in the beginnings of postmodernism cannot be coincidental. The urgency of meaning in our times, the necessity of context, background, circumstance, situation, perspective, and environment, as well as the desperation heard in the global voice are all too apparent in the postmodern artwork for one to explain away new art as simply a *reaction* to the very self-centered, object oriented, and self-indulgent modernist styles of 30 or 40 years ago (Jones, 1998). Postmodernism, it appears, is a part of a new world categorization through which we are all being refashioned.

Postmodernism must be seen as external. Modernistic art is concerned with only its own form, where its expression lies only within and does not extend beyond itself…the object (Kuspit, 1998). What seems to be at the very soul of postmodernism is its externalization, its inescapable effort to break away free from its formalized self and manifest its appetite to recognize, explore, and examine the world. Postmodernism is quite comfortable with taking sources of imagery from a variety of places (stealing imagery as Picasso used to say) – in other words, appropriating imagery, artistic as well as non-artistic, and incorporating it, juxtaposing it, and transforming it in such a way as to call into question the underlying structure of social reality in order to change it (p. 408). It seems to me that postmodern art is done within our world and life contexts, it is about all of us, and all that is important to all of us. Modernism is selfish. Postmodernism is about

community. Modernism is about isolation. Postmodernism is about dialogue. Modernism is about objectivity. Postmodernism is about subjectivity. Modernism works within strict limitations. Postmodernism raises doubt. Modernism comes to a logical conclusion. Postmodernism seems to be about inquiry.

For this study, the participants of the experiment and for myself, like postmodernism, represent undeniable shifts away from that which for so long we have found to be comfortable. Within a postmodern stance, form appears to be incidental to the substance. And though it sounds paradoxical, where modernism was un-centered because of its logical, conclusive, but internalized self-indulgency, centeredness is the essential predisposition of postmodernism. Art that externalizes itself, therefore would therefore obligate a sense of membership within the cultural stream, and become more than socially conscious, but with its membership comes an accompanying responsibility and expectation that encourages communication within that culture (Jones, 1999). Postmodernism is concerned with meaning and matter, and "with the related question of how we are to live in a seemingly dislocated and secularized world" (Godfrey, 1986, p. 156).

Educating the Postmodernist

It was revealed during an interview with Stella Ward, a participant in the research study, that the research mirrored a postmodernistic approach. I had asked her to put into her own words the reasons for her (and the others) success. She brought to light why a secondary advanced art education teacher should be concerned about

maintaining an updated and contemporary approach to teaching. With just a few words she spoke volumes of why conducting the research was so necessary and important for the artistic development for young artists. Before the study, "we saw you *as* the formal program of study. To us, you *were* the curriculum. But when you gave us the opportunity to design our own program of study, we had new life and enthusiasm. It opened a new and different dialogue with other students and with you. We were ready and wanted to share our *own* thoughts with you. Our work revealed our own self-reflective investigations that have to do with how we saw ourselves. We were allowed to care. We felt liberated to be artists, to explore, to interpret, and to address our own condition."

If we briefly examine the social context within which we live, terms like upheaval, transformed, dramatic, and global certainly can be accepted as descriptors of the social climate of our world (Jones, 1998). For myself as well as the students who participated in this study, a climate of change of new hopes and despairs constantly envelop us, especially through the news and entertainment media. If, also, we briefly examine the art domain of which I trust art educators are at least peripherally a part, terms like transformed, centered, externalized, and personal are certainly appropriate. If we examine the major art journals of the art fields, we find articles that deal with politics, economics, morals, manipulation of television by revolutionaries, and so forth. Just twenty years ago such articles would have been deemed intrusive into a visual arts journal, discussing instead some formalistic approach to visually stimulating pastel drawing, or something related.

I mentioned this because Stella's work, as well as that of her peers involved in the study, dealt with these same issues. Indeed, her statement to me was an appropriate and valid admonition. Moreover, if the current art journals are a clear indication of what is current in visual arts studies, why then is the subject of postmodernism, an area that is thoroughly embraced by studio artists, but until recently almost an underground movement, simply and mysteriously bypassed or avoided in the area of visual arts studies? Stella's remarks certainly made me aware of how instructors can get a little too caught up in the program to a point where the expansion and the potential expansion of individual student achievement can easily be overlooked.

Community of Inquiry

This study explores the generation of associates in a community of inquiry; a group built deliberately around and through dialogue or conversation-based inquiry. The participants were grounded in the intended view of reasoning, where objectivity was an impossibility, and subjectivity was multi-layered and, hopefully, sometimes contradictory. Macmurray (1999) states that personal knowledge depends on not what the individual does, but what the other does. If we refuse to "reveal" ourselves to the other, we cannot know ourselves however much we wish to do so. When the study began, I remember telling Stella and the others to make me think…to make the viewer of their works do some of the work in the making and completing of the art itself through discussion and the use of the viewer's imagination.

This kind of collaboration effort requires a good deal of effort from both the instructor and the student. Reflection and dialogue within such a classroom community of inquiry requires a reciprocity of effort; a willingness to be challenged by the ideas of others (teacher and peers); a process of reconstruction of one's own ideas and judgments based on such factors as consistency, rationality, and comprehensiveness; together with a sensitivity to the peculiarity of each situation and each idea under investigation (McRorie, 1997). Peer interaction is critical to the successful development and growth of a community of inquiry, although it is the teacher, perhaps, that is ultimately responsible for performing the tasks and keeping the dialogue at an inquiry level. Be that as it may, it is student-peer dialogue that is the eventual goal of establishing a community of inquiry. This seemingly simple pedagogical tactic rewards the asking of questions, and establishes a sense of ownership for the students toward their learning and artistic growth, to be sure, but perhaps more importantly to the program, the community, itself (p. 106).

Vygotsky (1978) has spoken of the importance of both teacher-student and student-peer interaction in the process of learning in the educational environment. He contends that we are capable of performing at higher intellectual levels when working in collaborative situations than when asked to work individually. His much discussed "zone of proximal development," which has to do with organizing classroom experiences so that the student utilizes higher levels of intellectual functioning, is "the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problems

solving under guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86). Vygotsky holds that when one establishes the right kind of environment, one under teacher guidance and collaboration with peers, students are able to produce something together. Significant inquiry by students, then, is more probable within the influence of postmodernistic or progressive educational setting. Thus, students are helped by others to function at a level intellectually beyond that which they might otherwise be expected to perform (McRorie, 1997).

Bruner (1985) explains "scaffolding and a spiraling curriculum" as that which functions to enable the learner to consciously and independently control a new task or conceptual system being used. This support system makes it possible for the learner to internalize both external knowledge and critical thinking skills and to convert them into tools for conscious intellectual functioning. If this interpretation of learning is correct, then the contention that it is inappropriate to expect visual art students to analyze and synthesize meaning from complex written texts or on art theory and criticism is a faulty one. The appropriate pedagogical structure or scaffolding must be provided. The community of inquiry discussed above was built through collaborative processes involved in development and nurturing. Because some students had better verbal skills and were less restrained about sharing their ideas aloud, they helped provide a model for students who were more reluctant to voice their ideas. The notion of more capable also refers to students who tend to be less vocal, but listen very carefully to the content and the progress of conversation and make fairly infrequent, but insightful, comments (P.107).

As Dewey pointed out long ago, interest is the starting point of education. Optimistic as that sounds, that is where the real frustration began for many of the students in the study. They were keenly aware of the modernist ideas underlying most of their previous art education experiences. But how does one teach art without relying on such principles, at least during the early stages of learning? How does one evaluate work that is not grounded in such ideas? If 'school art' doesn't look like school art, especially at the secondary level, what kind of programmatic, intellectual, academic, or emotional discord will result? Just how far will the instructor allow the students to go with their ideas? People define themselves by and in the conversations of which they are a part, and conversational inquiry is a good thing (Martin, 1985).

Doubt is the byword for postmodernism. Postmodern perspectives assault traditionally held values, beliefs, and practices by questioning truth, authority, and social norms. Postmodernism is described as a major intellectual shift from a modernist paradigm premised in science to a model rooted in social theory. The scientific paradigm privileges the logical, the rational, the universal, the stable, and the objective; while conversely, the postmodern model favors the diverse, the multiple, the temporal, the local, and the contradictory (Best & Kellner, 1991). The modernist, the objective; the postmodernist, the subjective. The modernist, isolation; the postmodernist; community.

Conclusion

Other than my own, I would be surprised to discover a syllabus written by a high school art teacher that exhibits a major focus upon artistic content and meaning, upon knowledge of current and recent events in the world, upon personal and emotional metaphorical reactions to situations and ideas, or upon grading systems that acknowledged the importance of such things as the narrative, or personal myth. Additionally, in most art courses, not only is there a display of a patently callous disregard of events defining moments in our current global history, but they also stand equally separated and insensitive to the contemporary world of art (Jones, 1999).

This study questions whether or not advanced secondary studio art courses are being informed by a traditional/formulaic approach rather than the true and genuine discipline of art, questioning that practice as unacceptable, irresponsible, and having a posture of dishonesty. Are the transformations of our world demanding that we abandon the infatuation of traditional/formulaic teaching as the primary and dominant practice? Should art educators assume the responsible pedagogical role of an informed instructor of art? Current research in art education (Jones, 1999; McRorie, 1997; Jackson, 1998; Heng, 2003; Borland, 2003) seems to suggest the following propositions:

First, an ambitious, energetic, and proactive effort to educate those who already are teaching must be undertaken. The cycle of teaching the way we were taught must be broken and those in their comfort zones of teaching a modernistic ideology must

be interrupted and challenged. An alarming silence concerning postmodernism is apparent within visual arts studies. Studio texts must effectively be lobbied to revise their content in order to reflect a postmodern attitude and spirit of the art domain.

Second, art educators must give students formal as well as instrumental experiences, I understand, but affective cerebral opportunities must also be given to students. Art is, after all, the interaction of humans.

Third, we must initiate efforts to dramatically redesign art education. If both the world and the domain of art have changed, then it only follows that the configuration of courses and experiences designed to prepare people for that world and that domain must also change in a manner that provides growth, and a continued desire for learning and intellectual inquiry.

Fourth, curriculum change must force wholesale modifications to the formalist content of art and art education courses. Courses that focus upon art production, must abandon the approach where the student-artist is solely absorbed in the interactive nature of materials and form only. If the world of art, in any way, is to inform its profession, it is clear that the rational, formalist, and cold objectivity of modernism be tempered by a new appreciation and acceptance of personal myth, celebrating our own unique life experiences, and the subjectivity of a postmodern era.

The optimistic view of progressivism envisions an art education in which local cultural practices are valued, the differences of those historically marginalized by virtue of gender, race, ethnicity, or class, are celebrated, and the cultural artifacts of all places and times are valid content for study by art educators and students. This

study explores through the perspective of the learning how teaching can serve to reconnect art and life in ways that can be meaningful to students while fostering critical and reflective attitudes (Pearse, 1997).

Many experienced educators will attest to the knowledge that high achievers are marked by their ability to learn, unlearn, and relearn. Prior to the beginning of the experiment, I asked myself that if self-directed learning was a valid way to test that theory? How ready were the students? How appropriate was it and would this study yield any significant insight into better teaching/learning by allowing student to design their own programs of study? I had to assess the potential participants of the study with the following questions: did I know whether or not the students had the ability to generate highly creative solutions to problems they would encounter?….did they prefer learning on their own and did they accomplish what they set out to learn?….did they show a desire to learn new things?…were they preoccupied with learning or wanting to learn new things?…did I feel that they were responsible for their own learning?

The students participating in this study saw themselves in a customer friendly oriented educational setting in which quality management, control, and learning practices were either determined or pre-determined. They saw their work as a product fitting into the predictable specifications of an established curriculum with little tolerance for variation, or where variance from the established classroom and product management control is reduced. In their eyes, product variation away from the determined design intent is minimized, thus decreasing student (customer)

frustration and increasing customer satisfaction. They understood the existing educational goal and setting as one in which a predictable pre-determined curriculum would contribute to wholesale increased satisfaction among the students (Dooley, 1995). However, they also saw the educational setting as one in which creativity was in a state of atrophy. They saw a decline in the art curriculum because little if any emphasis was placed on humanities courses in areas outside art as a way to compliment and under-gird current meaning in studio practice, which, in turn, would be more attuned to the concerns and practices of artists today regardless of their level of expertise (Risatti, 1989).

According to Hobbs (1999) "many art educators at the end of the century seemed united in the desire to distance themselves from old themes of creative and mental growth, yet are divided over what new direction the field should take" (p. 58). A question, then, arises about the currently accepted format of the secondary art curriculum as being overly academic. Is it possible to reconcile a progressive creativity and self-expressionistic art program with one emphasizing strict foundations? I embrace the notion that teachers of art be well grounded in aesthetics, criticism, and art history. Yet, conflicts seem to arise when attempts to increase hours in these subjects are thwarted by the continuing and possibly increasing emphasis on mechanical studio work. Another problem is the pervasiveness of the doctrine of formalism in the foundations curricula. While formalism was appropriate for analyzing certain kinds of early modern art and postwar abstract painting, it is inadequate for the most recent work of an unpredictable, impulsive, and spontaneous

generation of young artists that attend our schools today. Most traditional forms of art education, indeed Discipline Based Art Education, either ignores the subject of art theory or implicitly accepts formalism or is at the least seen as biased in favor of modernist-formalist concepts (Hobbs, 1999). This study addressed these issues.

This study approached learning in a manner in which students were engaged in different creative endeavors, resisting and questioning an educational environment, which in their mind repressed authentic creativity and invention. Creativity requires inquiry and exploration in order to gain knowledge and produce new viewpoints. The participants of the study grappled with new materials, new methods, and reconfigured personal ideas for optimal self-expression (Starko, 2001).

Gross (2005) points out that creativity requires active learning, critical thinking practice, and ingenuity. Further, she notes the importance of addressing the issue of seeking relief from pressures of artificial accountability and that many of today's learners have difficulties recognizing individual talents while resisting risk-taking (p.101). This study reveals within the participants revelatory experiences of realizing their creativeness and then wondering why they were not utilizing those personal strengths more frequently and explicitly (p.102).

This study argues that the formalistic and foundational pedagogical approach to art not be abolished or merely changed suddenly to one of postmodernism for the sake of change alone. Not change, growth. I enjoy looking at visually pleasing works, especially those completed by young artists. But the purpose of this study explores ways of learning deeper than that of the superficial exterior of a well designed and

rendered object. My job, as I see it for myself, and my admonition to others in my field, is to take students to a place of knowing and understanding of what it is to be more human. To do that, we must take them to a point and position of thinking as an artist. Where once they dealt with the attractive work and design, creating visually stimulating, but superficial works…for this research, learners delve within themselves and search for answers of intrinsic, metaphorically inward content.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Research suggests that progressive and non-traditional approaches in secondary art education may promote more diversified and unpredictable outcomes from students which in turn may lead to more enhanced creativity. For this study, naturalistic and action-based research inquiry was used to generate and confirm emerging progressive theory on secondary visual arts studies. The chapter begins with an overview of qualitative methodology followed by a description of the research design. The specific methodology is described including procedures used for data collection and analysis. The concludes with quality criteria used in the study.

Qualitative Methodology

To understand my role as a visual arts instructor and the role of advanced high school art students, qualitative research methods were utilized.(Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Qualitative methods were appropriate for this study in an effort to provide "an in-depth description of a specific program, practice, and setting" (Mertens, 1998, p. 159). This study also included phenomenology theory to explain the dominions and nature of phenomena as well as the interrelationships of particular phenomena (Patton, 1990; Senge, 1990). Because qualitative methods use by the researcher as an instrument in the data collection and analysis process, self-reflection was required

throughout the research process (Patton, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I began this study envisioning my role as a teacher/learner/researcher merging and becoming grounded through active interplay with the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 6, 12).

According to Patton (1990), grounded theory is "an inductive strategy for generating and confirming theory that emerge from involvement and direct contact with the empirical world" (p. 153). Grounded theories, because they are drawn from data, are likely to offer insight, enhance understanding, and provide a meaningful guide to action by using comparative analysis for generating theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). For this study, I sought to discover emergent and potentially multiple realities in resulting comparative analysis which, in turn, generated theory aided by an interest in Interactive Qualitative Analysis (IQA), a rigorous and detailed qualitative research method, also influenced this study (Northcutt & McCoy, 2001).

Research Design

This study is action-research documents student development from individually created syllabi and artwork separate and apart from the researcher/teacher. Understanding this study means identifying elements, describing the relationships, and understanding how the elements and relationships interact and, therefore, relies upon group proceses, interviews, and observations to understand and explain phenomenological relationships. The philosophy of IQA as a qualitative data gathering and analysis process depends heavily on these techniques to capture a

socially constructed view of respondents' reality (Northcutt & McCoy, 2001; Crotty, 1999).

Because qualitative inquiry designs are not completely specified in advance of fieldwork, the specific design for this study unfolded with the fieldwork (Patton, 1990). The research objective was to interpret various realities regarding the role of a high school advanced studio art instructor when particular students where given the opportunity to design their own program of study; to interpret any changes in the learning perspectives of the students; interpret and examine traditional and alternative learning methods in secondary art education; and, to examine any subsequent issues regarding self-esteem as relating to the existing educational setting.

Figure 3-47. Room H-107 at James Bowie High School; the interior art studio as it appeared during the research project.

This study investigated and examined the learning environment of eight advanced high school studio art students (The Group of Eight – G8); examined changes in learning perspectives of the participants involved in the study; explored and examined traditional and progressive learning applications for secondary studio art education and questioned whether or not a teacher-controlled curriculum denied learners holistic choices and understandings in learning experiences; explored and examined a philosophical understanding of what constitutes or qualifies an object as a work of art; explored and examined various aspects of gifted education; examined and explored a definition of authentic creativity from a learners point of view; and, examined and explored aspects self-directed learning, affects of a community supported learning environment, and any distinctive subsequent affects on self-esteem. To address the purpose of the study, I sought to answer following questions:

- What changes will occur in student/teacher relationships when students are given the opportunity to design their own program of study?
- Will those changes, if any, lead to new insights or revisions within the existing curriculum or personal pedagogical practices?
- Will periods of confusion and unresolved tension subsist in student/teacher relationships, which in turn affected artistic development?
- Will moments of new understanding within student development reveal more or less capabilities of satisfactory explanations of new insight capabilities of satisfactory explanations of new insights in personal development, and/or curricular rationale and purpose?

- Will a continuing wresting of artistic issues concerning communicative and mechanical skills, concepts, and aesthetic understandings occur and pervade student development?
- Will student work yield conducted during the study yield predictable results?
- How much of an understanding of aesthetics do advanced studio art students in a secondary art education setting possess?
- How is student learning affected by teacher limitations?
- To what degree do environmental conditions affect learning?
- How do students perspectives on learning and analytical decisions and judgments change when given the opportunity to design their own program of study?
- What changes occur in student learning/creativity with an unpredictable curriculum when compared to a standardized/predictable learning format?

Data Collection and Analysis

According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), researchers do not create data; they create theory from data. Therefore, the next step in creating a theory to describe the study involving the G8 and the educational setting and situation in which the study was revealed, was data collection from the group (artwork and journal entries), personal data collection (journals and photographs of the educational research setting), interviews, and observation. In qualitative research designed within phenomenological traditions, analysis is recursive and findings are generated as successive pieces of data are gathered (Mertens, 1998). The students involved in the

study, as well as myself analyzed the data obtained during the study and was based solely upon personal reflections, expressions, thoughts and experiences.

Kvale (1996) states the purpose of using interviews in qualitative research is to "obtain descriptions of the lived world of the interviewees with respect to interpretations of the meaning of the described phenomena" (pp.6, 31). Not only is interviewing one of the most powerful ways to describe and understand the central themes that subjects experience (Fontana & Frey, 2000) but also the conversation becomes the ultimate context within which knowledge is to be understood (Kvale, 1996). Strauss and Corbin (1994, 1998) believe interviewing is required in qualitative research to understand values and social behavior. They state that interviewing is the "only method of data collection sensitive enough to capture the nuances of human living" (1998, p. 28). Further, interviewing various subjects allows for the discovery of diverse and sometimes contradictory views of a given theme (Kvale, 1996).

Although spontaneous in most cases, interviews conducted in this study followed proper etiquette and procedures to authenticate the group's personal human characteristics, as well as to elicit thick descriptions of empathetic relationships with others in the group. The interviews consisted of a series of dialogues on aesthetics, artistic ownership and intent, critiques of particular artworks, and personal life experiences.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions are presented as they specifically relate to this study:

Portfolio – the portfolio for this study is a collection of no more than 44 individual art works, accompanied with statements explaining primary areas of interests, with additional statements explaining any influences and/or life experiences contributing to the personal theme of the portfolio. Statements of personal artistic intent to present the work for evaluation accompanied portfolios for the study.

Area of Concentration – For this study, an Area of Concentration represents a body of work (12 – 24 works) with a common subjective theme.

The Group of Eight (G8) – The eight high school seniors that participated in the study.

Traditional/Foundationalism – As it is relates to this study only, traditional or foundational approaches to art education involve the study of elements of art/principles of design; an understanding of cultural issues, which may or may not affect student learning; an ability to critically analyze works of art; an understanding of art history.

Modernism (or aspects of modernism) – teacher-centered, industrialized method of teaching in which results of student work is seen as a product, predictable in its outcome, and has logical conclusions.

Progressive or Postmodernistic (aspects of postmodernism) – ambiguous and unpredictable student and community centered learning with no logical curricular conclusion, raising more questions than answers.

Authentic Creativity – this term, as it relates to the G8 in this study only, is that which implies learning and developing separate from teacher influence or

interference, which would include initial idea, process, medium used to render work, as well as unconditional and unrestricted decisions by the learner to present work without teacher interference or curricular guidelines. For this study, the definition was formed by the participants of the study.

Artistic Intent – the concept of artistic intent consists of the belief that any evaluation of artwork without the intent of the artist renders the evaluation of the work incomplete, invalid, or presumptuous. For this study, no artwork was considered for evaluation, analysis, publication, or part of the study without the intent of the participant.

Additional Questions

The hypothetical expectations for the study are related with the characteristics of unpredictability Polkinghorne (1998) associated with quantitative methods versus qualitative methods of research and relate directly to the following questions:

1. Will new phenomena lead to new insights, transcending previous understanding but still retain elements in continuity? Asked another way, will a change occur in the questions of implementing a secondary art education curriculum without a total abandonment of the answers obtained before?
2. Will periods of confusion emerge with unresolved tension between old and new ideas?

3. Will new ideas reveal moments of advanced synthesis and understanding, in which a theory is revealed capable of explaining the new phenomena in a convincing and comprehensive way?
4. Will a continuing curricular wrestling occur with unresolved problems as a result of a new theory or phenomena?
5. Will realizations occur that a new theory or phenomena has deep unpredictable implications for secondary art education?

Subsequent questions concern: (A) clearer personal understandings concerning ownership of work and that artistic intent will increase an awareness of these issues within the Secondary Art Education curriculum; (B) student understandings of the value of personal ownership would have a positive affect on personal teaching and have a positive affect on student learning and promote a more efficiently productive; (C) students would be more willing to communicate more openly and often with other participants in the study; (D) the results of the study would provide unpredictable and unanticipated outcomes in both works and processes; (E) students would become better problem solvers; and, (F) diverse outcomes will increase creativity and innovation.

Protection of Human Subjects

Permission to conduct the study was obtained by submitting a research proposal to The University of Texas at Austin, the Curriculum and Instruction research committee of The University of Texas at Austin, the Austin Independent School

District of Austin, Texas. Final approval (The University of Texas at Austin IRB approval # 2002-04-0052) was obtained after all research concerns had been addressed satisfactorily.

All participants in the study volunteered for the research and signed consent forms to participate in the study, which described the purpose of the study, requirements of participation, and intended use of the data including possible publication of artworks. All student names used in the study are pseudonyms.

Procedures for the Recruitment of the Potential Participants

As criteria for inclusion into the study, each potential participant was required to be in their senior year of study and presently enrolled in an advanced studio art class at James Bowie High School, Austin, Texas. Each potential participant had a prior commitment of submitting a studio art portfolio to the College Board for evaluation for the 2001-2002 school year.

Participants of the Study

Participants for the research study were eight high school seniors ages 17-19, which includes six females and two males. All participants came from the same socio-economic background and all spoke English fluently. Of the eight participants, one was Asian male, one Hispanic female, two Italian females, and the remaining participants Caucasian. All participants were in excellent physical and mental health. The research began in October of 2001 and ended with concluding interviews in May

2004. All eight participants completed the study. In keeping with the context of the study each participant submitted a studio art portfolio to the Advanced Placement Program of the College Board for evaluation. However, each participant had the freedom to design the layout of their own portfolio with a disregard to the accepted and standardized portfolio format of the College Board's Advanced Placement Studio Art guidelines. The design layout of the Advanced Placement Studio Art will follow. The results of the portfolio evaluations of the participants of the study will follow, as well.

Protocol of the Study

Each participant designed a personal syllabus for the experiment in which personal goals, objectives, rationales, projects were stated and summarized for their chosen course of study ultimately culminating and represented in a visual arts portfolio. Each portfolio was required to feature an area of concentration, a thematic concept revealed within the major portion of the works in the portfolio. Each participant in the study maintained and made available to the researcher a journal that documented progress, creative ideas, and personal notations of successes and failures relating to the completion of projects listed in the syllabus. Additionally, each participant was encouraged to make random notations concerning personal and revelatory insights relating to personal growth, learning experiences, and artistic development. Each participant participated in impromptu non-structured interviews and critiques in which the researcher made hand written notes.

Quality Criteria

Denzin and Lincoln (1998b) speculate that, "a good constructionist interpretation is based on purposive examples, a grounded theory, inductive data analysis, and contextual interpretations" (p. 330). The procedures used in this study demonstrated a commitment to methods that increase a text's trustworthiness (p. 331). According to Lincoln (2002) and Guba (1985), trustworthiness consists of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The following explains how I incorporated these four components to ensure trustworthiness of the research.

Credibility. In qualitative research, credibility is a correspondence between the respondents' perceptions and the way the researcher portrays the data (Mertens, 1998). To ensure credibility in this study, I used triangulation, peer debriefing, and member-checking techniques as suggested and described by Lincoln and Gubw (1985).

Triangulation is the use of multiple and different sources (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I collected data from multiple interviews with the eight individuals participating in the study.

Peer debriefing is a process where I engaged a disinterested peer to provide an external check on the inquiry process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Peer debriefing was especially important in topic statement and question development, interview consistency, possible curricular changes in visual arts education, and student/teacher relationships.

Member checking, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985) is "the most crucial technique for establishing credibility" (314). Since research results are a representation of the participants' perceptions, it was essential that all eight participants were given the opportunity to check the data. Even though this study is action-research, I felt it necessary to authenticate with the participants the accuracy of my interpretations with their journal entries, interviews, and artworks. Formal and informal member checking was conducted with the participants.

Transferability. Transferability in qualitative research entails providing sufficient thick description for a reader to reach conclusions regarding transferring results to others situations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mertens, 1998). Rich data from journals, interviews, and actual artworks provided deep interpretations and descriptions of the study.

Dependability. Lincoln and Guba (1985) contend that the assessment of dependability involves "accounting for all available data and ensuring appropriateness of inquiry decisions" (p. 324). To ensure that all data were accounted for, I followed proper interview protocol. To ensure appropriateness of inquiry decisions, I was open to emerging themes and patterns, employed reflexivity during the research process, and conducted additional literature review.

Confirmability. Mertens (1998) states that confirmability means that the researcher does not contrive data and data interpretation. To establish confirmability, a confirmability audit was conducted (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I ensured all

qualitative data could be traced to its original source (Mertens, 1998). All quotes were referenced to interview transcripts. Also, I created a database to track data collection and analysis at each step (p. 184).

Conclusion

This chapter explained the methodology used in this study. The chapter began with an overview of qualitative methodology followed by a description of the research design used for this study. The specific methodology was described in detail including specific procedures for data collection and analysis. The chapter concluded with criteria to assess the study's quality using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) trustworthiness components.

Through the qualitative research methodology outlined in this chapter, I ascertained the curricular viability of learning perspectives of advanced studio art high school students, which resulted in a grounded theory regarding this phenomenon. The following chapter details these findings and includes descriptions of the factors that influence secondary visual arts studies.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter reports the findings of this study. It includes a description of the students who participated in the study and analysis of much of their work before the study and, after a description of each student's area of concentration, an analysis of journals entries documenting changes of learning perspectives, and an analysis of the educational setting in which the experiment was conducted before and after the study as documented in personal journals maintained during the study. Further, this chapter includes revelations of my pedagogical practices and methodologies. It also challenges the educational situation of those involved in the experiment of traditional teaching methods against those seen as progressive.

The initial motivation to conduct this study began with a conversion and a subsequent student challenge concerning artistic intent and artistic ownership. The student's claim of not having artistic intent and ownership of her work led the reciprocal experiment for the student participants to initiate their own rationale, goals, and course objectives without teacher interference, be the decisive first cause for their work, complete their work without teacher influence or interference in method, medium, content, or context, and to lay claim to their work with their own artistic ownership willing to present the work for evaluation with their own artistic intent. This study (1) explored the learning environment of advanced secondary visual arts

students involved in the study; (2) explored and recognized changes in the learning perspectives of the participants; (3) explored traditional versus progressive applications of learning in secondary art education and questioned whether or not an existing teacher-centered course of study denied students holistic choices and understanding with learning experiences; (4) explored and challenged a philosophical understanding of what actually constitutes a work of art; (5) explored some aspects of gifted education, authentic creativity; and (6) discussed self-directed learning, the influences of community supported learning, and the subsequent affects on self-esteem.

This chapter lists the names of the participants of the study, including their chosen areas of concentrations for their portfolios; includes a number of images of the educational setting where and when the research was conducted; several images of the art work completed by the participants with candid images of some of the participants in the research setting; passages from participants personal journals concerning their experiences during the study as well as commentaries with references to their work and the works of others; passages from my own personal journal in reference to the study; a restatement of the research questions stated in Chapter I with summary remarks; and, concluding inference and ontological remarks with explanations on participant's chosen areas of concentrations and individual works from the participant's journals.

Participants of the Study

Names (pseudonyms) of the participants of the study including their chosen portfolio areas of concentration and media used for the artwork during the experiment:

- Stella Ward; *Current and Past Personal Fears*; painting, digital photograph drawing.
- Stephanie Wonder; *Family Disruption* - painting, digital photography, drawing.
- Trip Monroe; *Hip Hop Culture* – painting, mixed media.
- Nic Phan; *Family Conflicts; Personal Complexities* – digital photography, painting, drawing, mixed media.
- Sophie Stephens; *Tragedy of Suicide* – digital photography, mixed media.
- Elizabeth Felicia; *Family Separation; Entry into Adulthood* – digital photography.
- Margie Ferrantti; *Remaking of Self* – mixed media.
- Elizabeth Bennet; *Self as Object; Cultural Abuse* – painting, drawing, mixed media.

Research Questions and Issues

(1) - **What changes occurred in the student/teacher relationship; that is, did the study provide data regarding potential enhancement or deficiencies of teacher influence in the educational setting and how did those alter learning perspectives?**

The study presented information concerning mutual influence in student/teacher interaction, a counter-perceptive "togetherness-in-separation" concept. From both the

participants and my point of view, pedagogical enhancements and deficiencies were either exposed or developed with regards to my teaching. Personal entries from my own journal and those of the participants reveal a fluent relationship between the students and myself. In many ways, not only did we have the same goals and objectives within the same field of study and educational setting, but apparent gestures for parallel development, or a co-developmental theme became an important feature of the study. No longer did the students have a sense of a hegemonic learning atmosphere in which I conducted a one-way instructional product oriented system of teaching. Moreover, the competitive achievement-compensation system that rewarded technical mastery was eliminated. The students saw themselves on equal ground with equivalent creativity abilities they were much more willing to share openly. Further, once the experiment was well under way they saw me as one providing a security fence around their space in which they had new found freedom for self-expression without fear of breaking conventional perception of teacher-student relationship. In journals and interviews they spoke of added personal responsibility, and implied that before the study it was the teacher ultimately providing the responsibility for the work…ideas, process, and materials.

> I felt removed from teacher influence. His role became one as more of a surveyor. Now, he seemed to get me warmed up concerning philosophical ideas and thoughts. That never happened before. I felt a satisfying sense of accomplishment when the portfolio was finished because I could really express myself without the guidance or interference of someone else, although some help (from peers' opinions) was necessary. I gathered strength from the group. With everyone's open-minded and innovative ideas, I was motivated to do more work. At times I was intimidated because so much new work was going on around me

and I wasn't used to producing much work…but, in the end, the group was very strengthening and fulfilling and moved me to create more.

The group made me feel like part of a family. I loved those guys. I'll remember all the new ideas and images they came up with. They were the reason I felt worthy of being here. I was inspired. The group gave me courage. I learned the importance to try new territory.

- Stella Ward

Because I was more self-directed I kind of felt that I had a mission. I had a reason to be at this school. Being self-directed made me feel like more of an individual, that I had value and was unique. My work came more from the heart. But without the group I would have lost. I felt like I belonged. The group gave me support to be myself.

The teacher did affect my work even when I didn't use his advice or opinion. I could tell he was mad when I got lazy. Now that I think about it, I don't remember him having much influence over me in the completion of my portfolio. I'm proud of my ideas and gained confidence in my work with time. Completing the portfolio help me come to terms with myself. What the teacher did was help me understand that before the experiment I was used to being spoon fed with instruction. It was hard to think on my own. He helped me accept what I cannot change (my area of concentration was about the suicides of my English teacher and of a close friend of mine during the early part of the school year), and to own up to my own artistic thoughts and feelings in my art. My portfolio makes me feel vulnerable, but very proud.

- Sophie Stephens

The teacher changed after the experiment began. He used to tell us what to do. Then he became more of a person than a teacher…but became more of a teacher by being more of a person. He affected me as an artist by helping me understand the importance of continually growing and learning…that art is never ending. He would always say that art is a way, not a thing. He made me stop worrying about grades and credits.

- Stephanie Wonder

The group suddenly started using so many different mediums and using so many different processes. I used to doing the same thing that everyone else was using, and learn by watching others. Then I got lost because so much was going on I didn't know where to look. I had a hard time at first when the experiment began. Then I realized that I could get so many different ideas from the others in the group on how to solve so many different kinds of problems. But the portfolio was mine, and no one else's. Before the experiment the things I had done that I thought were good were really pretty non-descript. My work, like me, was just taking up space. The group helped work with a purpose and I raised my

standards. The teacher helped me see how my work could have direction that art was about doing what I knew and understood.

Even though I knew I could match the ability level of the others, I was on equal ground with them creatively. I was motivated to be around the others in the group. I no longer wanted to work just by myself. I was very calm. The studio was our place and our space, and yet it provided solitude for me as an individual. In there, I never felt bothered. In there, even with everything was going on around me, but I felt a solitude that I couldn't even get at home.

- Margie Ferrantti

The study was not about triumph, victory, success, or even achievement. The study was about the struggle. Each member of the group was angry at something. The study allowed for the spontaneous forming of a group, which in turn helped each individual member place an emotional part of themselves on canvas or in a print. At times they became belligerent and confrontational. I wished at times they would have behaved differently, but, after all, they were high school students. They were imperfect, but in their fallibility they made me realize that I was also.

Struggle in life is not resolved. They easily admitted that they were part of a self-absorbent impatient culture. It was difficult for them to ask for help sometimes. Some had to struggle with their pride and poise to ask for help once the experiment had started. They wanted so much to prove themselves and I purposely played on that tension between us if not creating more of it. Not all of their works were successful. The early work was rushed and not thought through properly. I thought about canceling the experiment. They all had a deadline and each work needed study. As the study progressed the group realized that success includes failure. I think they all realized soon enough that even I was learning from them as they learned about themselves. I think they had new appreciation for me in giving them the opportunity to chart their own course of study and that I was willing to let the winds of impulsiveness take them where they would go.

We were, in many respects, on common ground exploring new curricular territory, but they knew I was still their teacher. My life experience would always place us in an asymmetrical and unequal relationship. I had warned them that being an artist was the struggle through failure and self-doubt. It is true that member of the group experienced failure. What helped them over come their early failures in the experiment, however, was knowing that I was a failure, as well. In spite of that, I somehow got them to believe in what they were doing. They became metaphors for life struggles as artists…either they play it safe and do the predictable, or they challenge the existing conditions. I think as I look back on my teaching prior to the experiment, I was really protecting myself by placing myself in some sort of comfort zone. But, I wasn't learning. That wound

> of the past can never be recovered, but at least I began to understand the past and my predictable never take chances pedagogy.
>
> - Personal journal entry; Spring '02

(2) - **Did those changes, if any, lead to new insights or revisions within the existing curriculum and/or my personal pedagogical practice?**

The study revealed the protectiveness of the curriculum. It is true that they learned high levels of skills and knowledge under their previous course guidelines. They were proficient in their knowledge of the elements of art, many aspects of art history, their culture, and each had an ability to critique and analyze works of art. But their knowledge was second hand. However, they had never been allowed to practice failure. They had never been allowed to practice the art of being an artist. Prior to the experiment their work was about production, not the intrinsic understanding I always wanted them to display. Their work had been about attaining results, not about answers. The study led directly to an investigation with artistic intent, artistic ownership, and authentic creativity.

As far as revisions to the curriculum, the G8 wrote personal objectives, rationales, and objectives. As one would expect, the students' curricular writing was unsophisticated and basic if not overly simplified. Their primary concern was to complete a portfolio of their own accord. It was not until late in the study did they or myself realize any impact of any possible significance to the curriculum. Every member of the group regarded the narrative writing of their work as invaluable. I had asked that each participant of the experiment record notes about any thoughts or

experiences that related to their work, regardless of how remote the connection. I don't recall any member of the group saying that they had ever kept a journal before the study. Personal presentations improved because each member of he group could express themselves easier. The students were better able to explore the work of the others and offered challenges to others. Many remarked that they knew how others were thinking about their they better knew how they personally knew their own work from writing so much. I think any curricular change would have to include a writing element to the course of study.

As far as pedagogical changes, I had never allowed students to actually practice being artists. Time always seemed to a critical issue. I always felt pressure to cover a certain amount of material and never really considered learning styles or skill levels in covering what I felt were needed to understand art. I had always found myself teaching to the top and letting the others catch up or never finish, but it was always about mechanics…never about personal voice. The results of the study pointed to a real need by the participants to address the issue of authentic creativity, artistic intent, and aesthetic interests of the individual artist.

> At the end, I wanted the study to continue. Not because I hadn't gathered enough data…I actually gathered more than the study could hold. I wanted the study to last because magical things were happening. We forgot about skill levels and high evaluations on portfolios. The group became artists and they began to understand what it meant to be more human. The emotional connectiveness they experienced was worth the study in itself. We all changed. I understood for the first time in my teaching career the complexities of my students' lives and the value of their collective and individual voices.
>
> -personal journal entry (May 2002)

(3) - **Did periods of confusion and unresolved tension exist in student/teacher relationships which in turn affected artistic development?**

The students in the experiment experienced a role reversal. At the beginning of the study, students embodied an outlook of self-importance to a point of establishing communication barriers. Eventually, once the study was well under way, they saw me as one who cared about their difficulties as much as they themselves. A noticeable difference in their responses to me as well as a deeper involvement to their work occurred once they realized the responsibilities of caring for their work. The counter-intuitiveness, or together in separation occurrence we experienced actually led to a mutual teacher/student trust. While we became more of a mystery to each other, which, in return was manifested in a mutual human attraction. I was no longer associated in their eyes as an object. I had become a human being from which the participants needed genuine feed back for their humanity charged artworks.

> When the experiment entered the Spring semester, I associated my relationship with the teacher the way I relate realistic art to abstract art. I mean, I'm usually the type of person that has to practice to achieve (near) perfection in all subjects, and other aspects of my life as well. Art is a way of dealing with frustration, clarity in chaos. I struggle with realism – it's easy to make things abstract. Realism and accuracy is something I still can't grasp with my art. My life is not accurate. I don't see it as realism. I see it as abstract. Before the experiment, he wanted me to be realistic. Is suicide realistic? Isn't that abstract? Doesn't that make life for living of those who knew the ones who died abstract? I was abstract…I saw the teacher as realism. When the experiment began, I was uncertain of what to do. But it slowly became more abstract with my separation from him. I was really nervous at first doing what I felt I needed to do or wanted to do. But when he liked the

abstract work I brought to school that I had been doing at home even before the experiment I kind of thought it was OK to do it at school.

-Sophie Stephens

I keep wanting tomorrow to come. He keeps telling me to appreciate the past and live in the moment. I think he's pointing me in the right direction but I'm afraid to show him my work. I always ask the others in the group to critique my work before he sees it. I guess I just need to make sure that I have own, being own artist. I need to loosen up.

We had a discussion today about taking ownership of yourself and your work. He said our work should be like our signature. This experiment is the first time I've been confronted with that kind of thinking. He always pretty much told us what to do before. When we take ownership we can step outside of our comfort zones…but we have to think on our own to explore and learn about ourselves, and what we can and cannot do. This is not easy. Sometimes I don't know what my role is anymore. Am I my own teacher, now?

-Elizabeth Bennet

(4) - **Were moments of new synthesis and understanding revealed in which the student became more or less capable of satisfactory explanations of new insights concerning personal development, as well as curricular rationale and purpose?**

They, for the first time, had a genuine understanding of curricular purpose. Before the experiment, course purpose, objectives, and rationale were of no concern to the student participants of the study. With the design of their own study in which they had to justify their work, new curricular understandings were accompanied by an accountability of validating their course rationales and objectives. They were open up to communicative appreciation from artwork and from each other.

> We went to the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston today. I know now what it means to communicate through art. I stood before paintings completed 400 years ago. I was in a trance. Something spoke to me today, through the paintings, through the hands of the figures, even through the fingernails of those hands. I was captured by the work, or was it by the artist. I understood what the teacher said a long time ago…art is for the present and for those in the future. I was in love.
>
> -Elizabeth Bennet

The validity of artistic communication is not always pleasant; even in an artist's own work. The true value of the community established by the participants in the study was their openness to each other, and willingness to share personal feelings about other's artwork.

> My art was about my rebirth as a person. I am beginning again. The break-up of my family started me on the journey of renewal for myself. My work is birth…my entry into my new world…away from the past…into the unknown, just like a newborn. My pictures are out of focus, like I was… about not knowing, like me…but, leaving everything behind, and entering my new world with nothing, ready to gain everything. The experiment was perfect timing. My old self is dead. What a terrible lie that was.
>
> - Elizabeth Felicia

(5) - **Did any artistic issues arise concerning communicative and mechanical skills, concepts, and aesthetic understandings that pervaded student development with continuous unresolved problems?**

Not that I was ever aware of at any time in self-expression, the processes of completing their work, or the intent of showing their work did I notice students being held back. Their journals entries were sometimes awkward. However, where every member of the G8 encountered problems, every member found a solution, mostly with help from others. Many times, members voluntarily helped the others without

being prompted. No members of the G8 wrote about problems of mechanics in their journals or spoke of problems in critiques or interviews. Their only concern was about whether or not their message would make it through the art to the viewer. Their primary concern was properly explaining in words what they were doing. They knew what they believed, they just had trouble explaining those beliefs.

> Regardless of foundational skill levels, or mechanical know how, it amazes me to see the personal connectiveness of the group members. Everyone seems for the first to be on equal ground, each placing value on other's work. But they have trouble explaining their thoughts in writing.
>
> -Personal journal entry (Feb '02)

> How do I do this…I mean how can I explain my feelings of describing how I really feel about what I'm trying to say about the objectivity of women…this is new to me-the subject and the art.
>
> -Elizabeth Bennet

> Do others really want me to try and explain my feelings about my Dad leaving home? How do I, how can I do that? Isn't my artwork enough?
>
> -Stephanie Wonder

(6) - **Did student work yield predictable or unpredictable results and, if so, did those results promote an increase or decrease in learning?**

Without any question, the results of the study and works by the participants were unpredictable. I was no longer the first cause of their work. Everything they did, everything they wrote, and everything they shared in the interviews concerning the experiment was new territory for me as a teacher. Most of the work was not only unpredictable in subject matter, but media and process as well. How could I have predicted such sensitive subject matter? I never would have assigned students to

address the artistic content chosen by the G8. Learning increased and questions were raised. The sense of logical conclusion gave way to inquiry.

> My art was never as good as the others before the experiment …now, they all said how powerful it was. I had never used a digital camera before the experiment. My work began to speak beyond the mystery or fascination of the images to questions the images raised…because of the questions, people understood me better.
>
> -Elizabeth Felicia

> I really thought I could do better than some of the work that was going on around me. But I was exposed to so many ideas...things got so complex. Once I figured out why I wanted to do some of the things I did, I never had enough time to do them. I learned more about art in the last three months of the experiment than in the previous three years combined.
>
> -Nic Phan

> When I strayed from my syllabus, my work began to have direction. When my work began asking questions, I knew I had learned something.
>
> -Margie Ferrantti

> When my new work was first seen, no one really said much. Then people began to ask me about any personal connections to the work. After a while, it seemed that every member of the group got in this sort of groove where we all knew the work we were doing was somehow going to be personal. Others then would gather around and try to figure it out. It was great. We all raised new questions about who we were…things no one else knew…things really important to us no one else knew about. It was a wonderful few months. It ended too soon.
>
> -Elizabeth Bennet

(7) - **How much of an understanding of aesthetics did the students possess?**

Much more than I anticipated. Their only problem was visually dissecting their work and explaining why they did what they did. The participants of the study had never been given opportunities to study or to explain the concept of aesthetics. Based simply on a visual examination, I think their work spoke with a sophistication that I

had not anticipated. The level of aesthetic interest in their work, regardless of their inability to explain it, was readily apparent.

(8) - **Was student learning a direct reflection of teacher limitations of knowledge and skill level? Or, how much of student learning was under the direct influence of the teacher in studio art…is the end result justified by the means?**

It is difficult to know how much they were learning before the study. Prior to the study they did what I wanted them to do. They were weary of doing work under my control. They were at Level IV, in their 4th year of working with me, and they were ready to break away from the existing curriculum. The group had exhibited mastery of foundational skills prior to the study.

If the end product prior to the study was that everyone was doing the same, then the curriculum was working. But does that not in some way violate the premise of being an artist? If so, is the end was not justified by the means? Does predictable work promote inquiry? With no inquiry, is learning stifled? In the study, my role as a teacher changed. I became the context in many respects, the security for creativity without repercussion. Before the experiment, I was the influence, the *affect*, and the first cause of their work. During the experiment, their work was the *effect*, influencing others, initiated by the students. Before, the work was an end…now it was a means.

Before, my work was for a grade. I had a hard time finishing my work, and I

ended up despising it. Some of my figure studies were just bland…no meaning. I did not like just reproducing the image on paper. Now, I feel a sense of responsibility. Before I did everything that was asked of me. Now I realize I was too dependent, because when I started my own work, I felt a sense of expansion as a person. Before I was like a racehorse, but never able to get through the gate…now I'm through the gate. I hope the race never ends.

-Stephanie Wonder

(9) - **To what degree did environmental conditions of affect learning within the classroom and how did those conditions change when students were given opportunities to design of their own programs of study?**

Current curricular guidelines suggest individual development, with no reference to community supported learning as an option for idea exchange. Every member of the G8 remarked how important it was to have space away from the others not in the study. Immediately after the study began, the members broke away from the traditional classroom atmosphere of not only in the physical environment, but the social climate as well.

They strengthened me. We were tighter, we grew closer and sort of bonded…I formed quality friendships.

- Stephanie Wonder

With everyone's free-thinking and innovative idea, more work seemed to move me. At times, I was intimated and moved to create my own work. The 'Elite Eight' was very strengthening…and helped me take risks.

- Stella Ward

I saw what others were capable of and I wanted to match their ability, but it was different from a competition. We all rose to same level. They motivated me.

- Nic Phan

I was happy when others were happy, and sad when they were sad. Sometimes I was jealous and sometimes I was mad at them. I admired all of them. Each of

them inspired me. They taught me so much…not only how to use things like the computers, but how to think, how to not hold back. I was timid but became stronger.

-Sophie Stephens

I was accepted…something my family at home did not do.

-Elizabeth Felicia

I was not afraid to ask naïve questions.

- Elizabeth Bennet

I loved the distance from the teacher. I mean, he talked to us every day, and checked on our work, asked if we had questions and all, but he let us fall and pick ourselves up on our own. It was great to fall and get up. I always got up stronger, but I needed the group's help from time to time.

- Margie Ferrantti

(10) - **How did student perspectives on learning and analytical decisions and judgments change when given the opportunity to design their own program of study?**

In becoming their own artists, they had a direct connection to failure and subsequent success. They understood how relationships fostered creativity and personal identity. They became risk takers. They had to become innovators to survive the experiment. They had never had to make decisions. They moved beyond replication. Their work raised inquiry. For the first in their educational experiences, the G8 had an appreciative concept of the curriculum.

I never knew that a curriculum included so much stuff.

-Nic Phan

(11) - **Did changes occur in student learning/creativity with an unpredictable curriculum when compared to a standardized predictable program of study?**

The diversity of creativity was unparalleled. No one was doing the same thing. Everyone had new things to look at and new ideas to share everyday. In seven months the G8 went well past where they would have gone had it not been for the experiment. They were allowed to practice being artists. The curriculum in many ways expanded with their unpredictability. Questions arose, and risks were taken. For the first time, failures in process and media occurred, however the achievement level rose, and as a result, so did their self-esteem. Time after time members of the G8 remarked about how good they felt about themselves and their accomplishments. None of the G8 remarked about intellectual levels of excellence. Each saw themselves on common ground with something to share.

The community of learning they formed at the beginning of the study was a telling element of the experiment exhibiting energy for need of compassion. When comparing work of the group before the study, it is difficult to find any commonalities. Except for self-portraits, no work of the experiment was like any of the work prior.

Analytic Statements of Portfolio Areas of Concentration

Stella Ward – *Current and Past Personal Fears*

> "Many sources of inspiration stemmed from personal experiences and difficult relationships. By using art to communicate my struggles to the audience I came up with a focus reflecting my challenges, fears, strengths, and weaknesses. I

experienced a series of personal events that questioned my trust in others…my parents and their impending divorce, my friends, my boyfriend. I had genuine fears about where life was taking me. My work was about questions."

Figure 4-76. Stella Ward, *The End of My World?*; oil on canvas.

Figure 4-77. Stella Ward, *What is Real?*; oil on canvas.

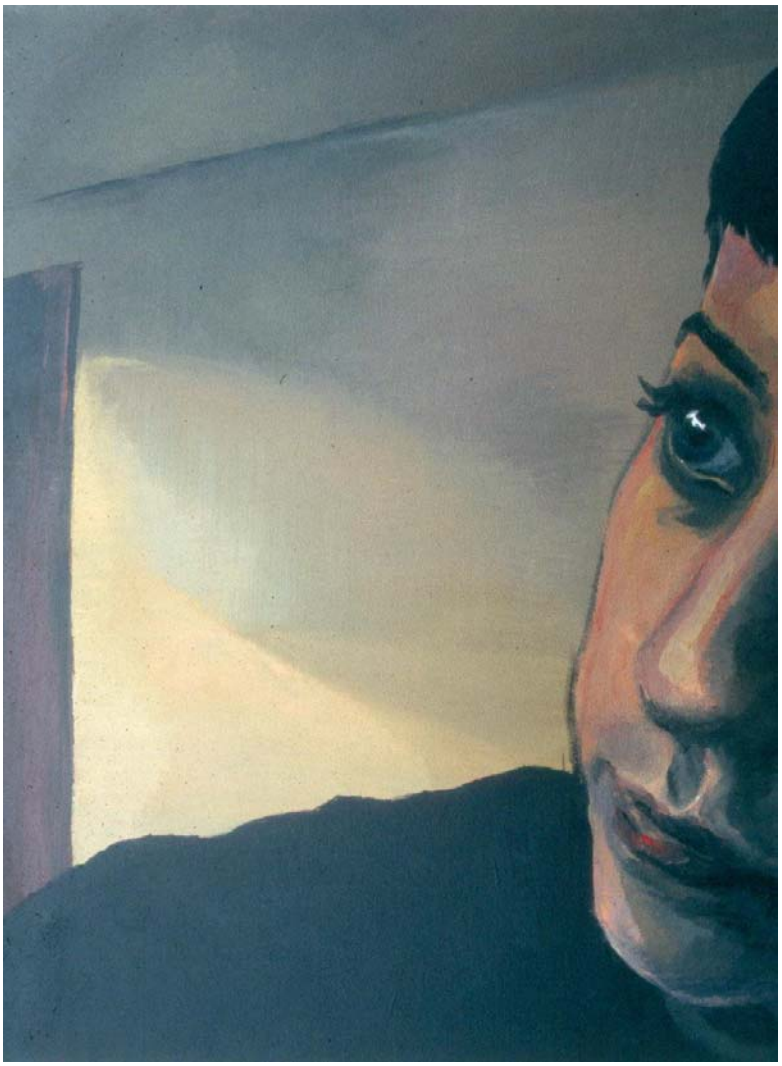


Figure 4-78. Stella Ward, *Self-Portrait-Into the Dark*; oil on canvas.

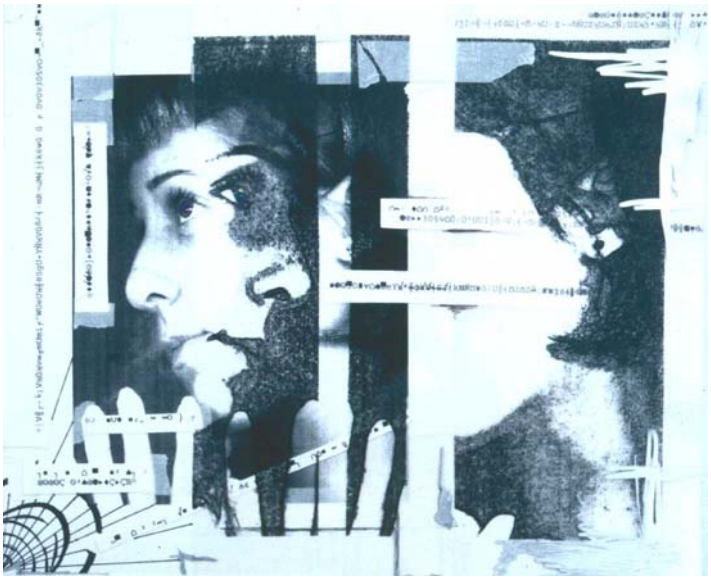


Figure 4-79. Stella Ward, *No where-Now here*; mixed media.

Figure 4-79a. Stella Ward; *Twists of Life*,
mixed media.

Stephanie Wonder – *Family Disruption*

"My work was mostly about myself. After going through what I went through I was just trying to find out where in my world I could fit. Watching your father walk out the door and leave the family has had a lasting impact. My work helped me deal with all of that. My work helped in discovering what was real and what was imagination or dreams. A television on the beach? That makes no sense!"

Figure 4-80. Stephanie Wonder, *Non-sense*; oil on canvas

Figure 4-81. Stephanie Wonder, *Insides Out!*; Digital Photograph

Figure 4-81a. Stephanie Wonder, *Fragmented Self- Portrait*;
oil pastel on paper

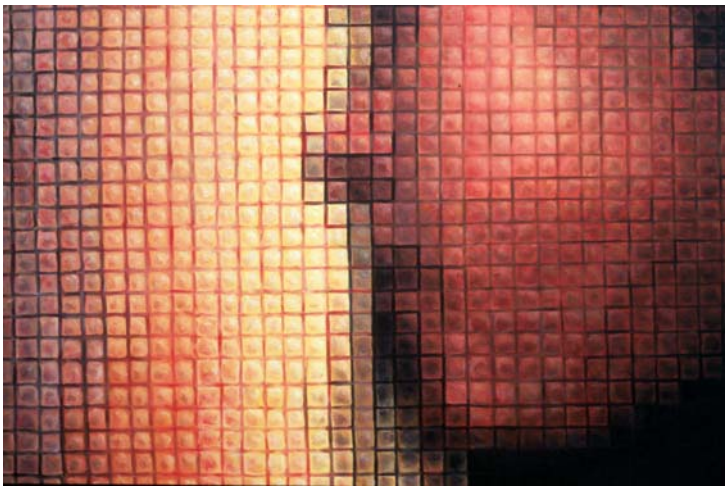


Figure 4-82. Stephanie Wonder; *Fragmented-Grid Self-Portrait*; oil on canvas.

Figure 4-82a. Stephanie Wonder, *Leave Me*; mixed media.

Trip Monroe – *Hip-Hop Culture*

"Honestly, I just wasn't as involved as I should have been, I guess. All I knew to do was innocuous still life paintings and drawings, at first. I was too caught up in the hip-hop culture. By the time I realized I could use that as a

legitimate statement or commentary for my work, the experiment was almost over. For so long, I was lost and confused…I was denying my own interests. Then, I finally understood, but time ran out. I never did all I could do. In the end, my work became visually complex, confusing, and textured…like the hip-hop part of me."

Figure 4-83. Trip Monroe, *Pumpkin Observation*; oil pastel.

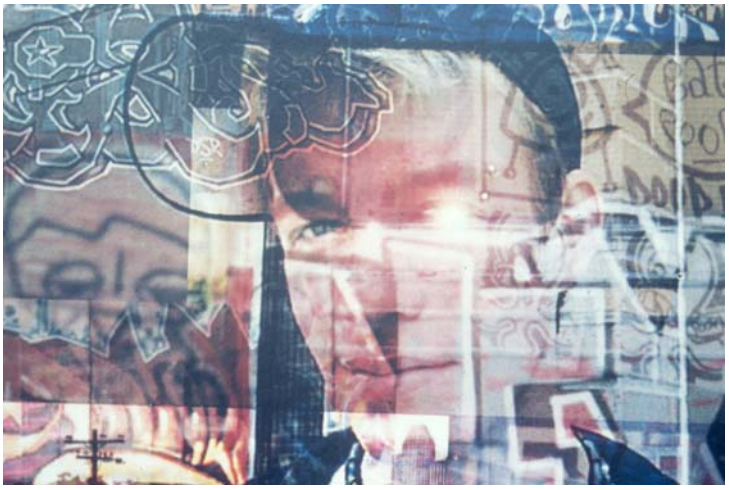


Figure 4-83a. Trip Monroe, *Hip-Hop Head*; mixed media.

Nic Phan – *Family Conflicts; Personal Complexities*

"Physical abuse is not a fun topic to talk about or look at. I did not really know how to deal with it. Some of my images about fear worked really well for me, and fear was worse than the actual event. No one will ever know what I went through. Just look at the work…look behind the work. I just wanted to be an American kid, and home and at school. But I lived two lives that no one knew about…Vietnamese at home; American at school. My work was about the complexities of self."

Figure 4-84. Nic Phan, *Inner-self*; oil on canvas.

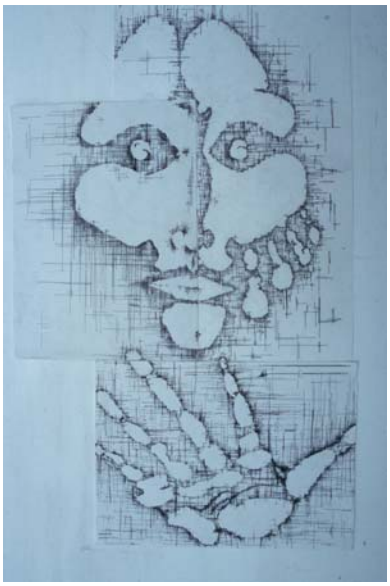


Figure 4-85. Nic Phan, *Shroud*; pen & ink on paper.

Figure 4-85a. Nic Phan, *Inside Self-Portrait*; digitally manipulated photograph.

Figure 4-86. Nic Phan, *The War Ended Just on the Land*; ink on paper

Figure 4-87. Nic Phan, *Just Click on "OK"*; mixed media.

Figure 4-88. Nic Phan, *P.O.W.*; mixed media

Sophie Stephens – *Tragedy of Suicide*

"Horror. Shock. Disappointment. Confusion. I felt like a jig-saw puzzle shattered on the floor. One suicide is difficult enough…no words can describe the awfulness of three. I'm glad, though, that I had a chance to deal with it through my work and with others."

Figure 4-89. Sophie Stephens, *Suicide Always Lives in Others*; torn drawing on newspaper.

Figure 4-90. Sophie Stephens, *Save Yourself*; mixed media

Figure 4-90a. Sophie Stephens, *For the Dying*; mixed media.

Figure 4-91. Sophie Stephens, *Not On my Hands*; mixed media

Elizabeth Felicia – *Family Separation; Entry into Adulthood*

"I don't care what people think about my work. In my mind, I was starting over. The pictures of me where about beginning a new life, not about the past or what caused me to deal with wanting a new beginning. It was all about now, here and now. I entered the 'now' with nothing, the 'new beginning' with nothing…just my body. I discovered that the people I had always thought were my parents were not. I was adopted. I found and contacted my real parents in another city…they said they just couldn't handle having in their lives. My photos represent my new birth."

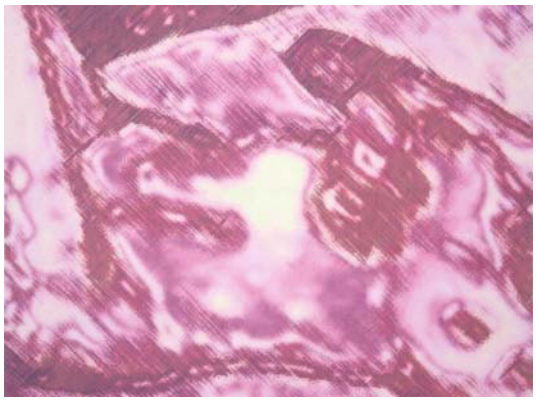


Figure 4-92. Elizabeth Felicia, *Emerging Self #1*; digital photograph

Figure 4-92a. Elizabeth Felicia, *Emerging Self #2*; digital photograph

Margie Ferrantti – *Remaking of Self*

"First turmoil at home, then with my boyfriend. How did that happen…the abuse, the physical abuse. My work was about my anxiety of living at home with those who loved to hate me. My work was my refuge, my escape, and my way of dealing with tumult, confusion, and turmoil. I tried to make it (the work) as calm as possible."

Figure 4-93. Margie Ferrantti, *Anyone There?*; digital photograph

Figure 4-94. Margie Ferrantti, *Under the Weight*; digital media

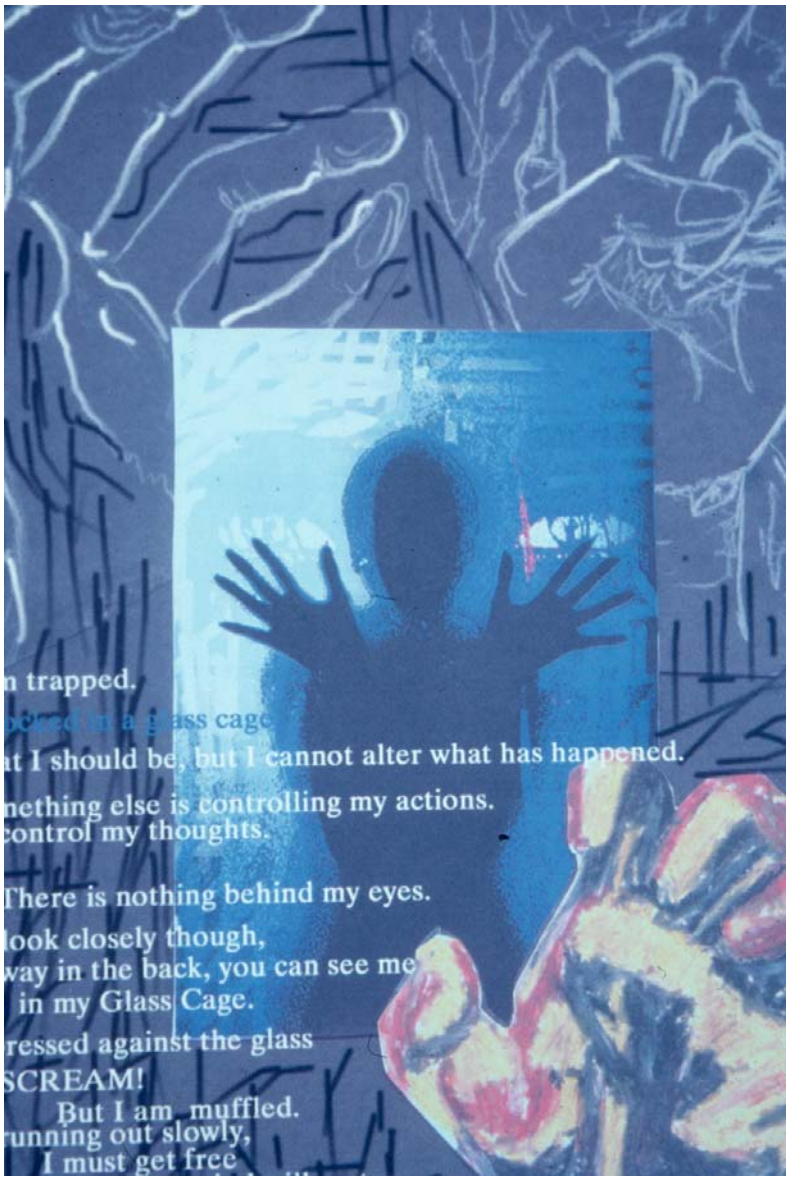


Figure 4-95. Margie Ferrantti, *I Must Get Free*; mixed media

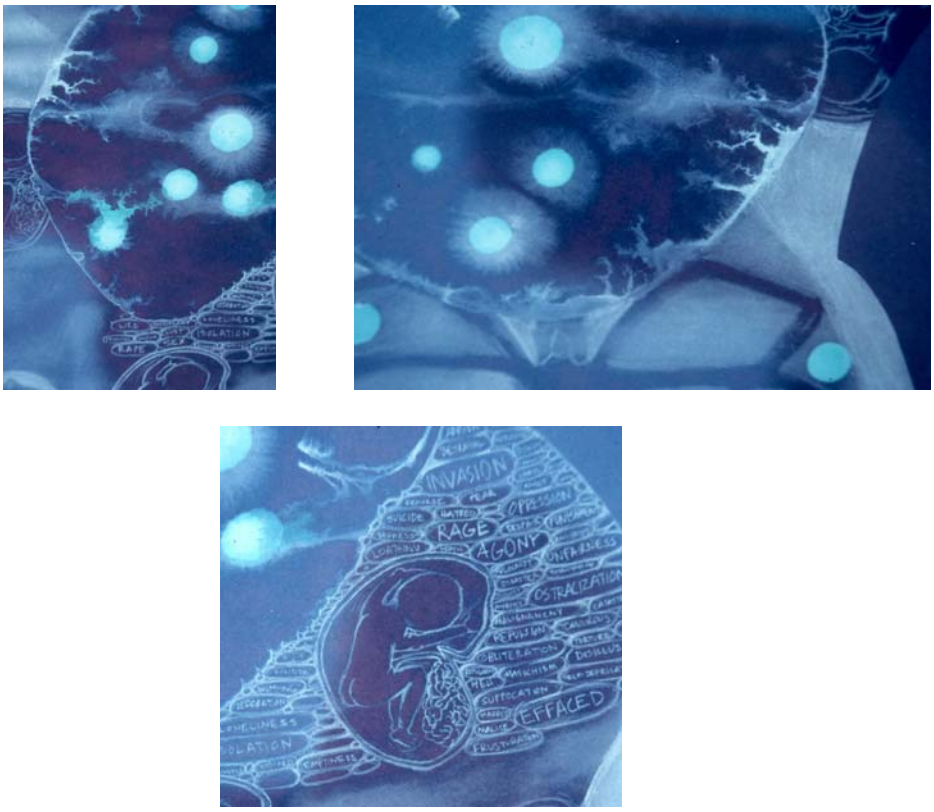


Figure 4-96. Margie Ferrantti, *Abortion*; colored pencil on posterboard.

Elizabeth Bennet – *Self as Object*

Objectivity of Women - Objectivity of me…because I'm a female!? I'm tired of walking down the hallway and being stared at from the neck down…I'm just a girl. My artwork is a little bit about anger…and I'm just 18. Just look at me.

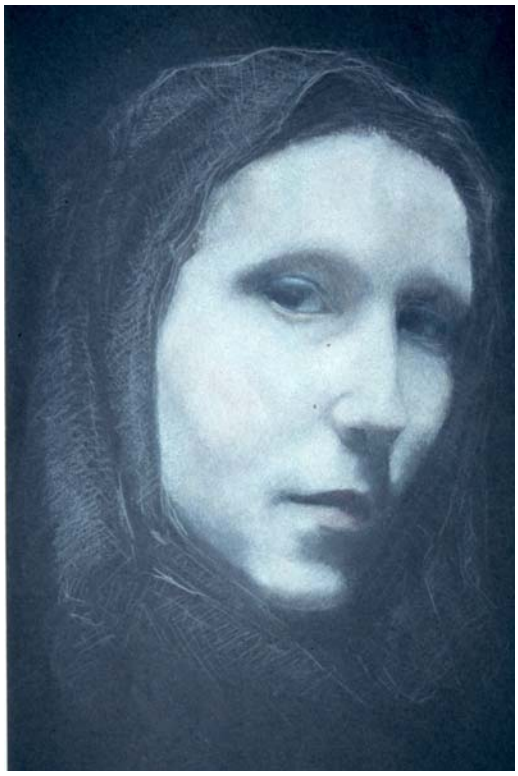


Figure 4-97. Elizabeth Bennet, *Portrait*; soft-pastel

Figure 4-98. Elizabeth Bennet, *How I Am Seen*; mixed media

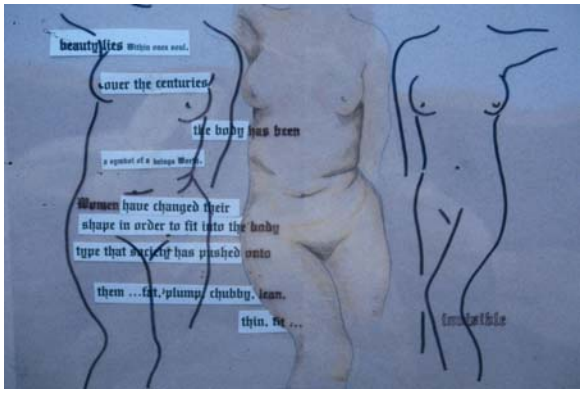


Figure 4-98a. Elizabeth Bennet, *I'm Just a Girl*; mixed media

Figure 4-99. Elizabeth Bennet. *I'm Just a Girl II*; oil on canvas

Research's comments regarding the work –

Without question, the subject matter of the G8 was unpredictably troubling. Had the quality of the work not been rendered at such a high level, I may have questioned the wisdom of completing research project. Perhaps disturbing in content, nevertheless, they raised critical issues facing not only them as individuals, but of their culture as well. I don't believe they would have had the courage to address such sensitive issues without group support. So many disconcerting subjects were addressed that the thought actually crossed my mind that the subjects of their work were, perhaps, made up. However, interviews and journal entries verify to the legitimacy of the content of their works. They all practiced beings artists of their own accord. In no way would I have assigned projects that would have dealt with the variety of such troubling subjects. The work was their call…the subjects of their works needed to be dealt with in their way. They were the first cause of their work. Perhaps, it would be safe to imagine pleasant responses from the G8 concerning the content of the work, but

life is not always pleasant and not always the way we would like it to be. What the group did was question their existence, and the existing conditions of their learning environment. It is what artists do. The diversity of their work illustrated the diversity of their lives.

-Personal journal entry; June '02

Analytic Statements of Some Significant Works

Stella Ward –

"I see two colors, but I'm blind to everything else. In one color there is curiosity and excitement; in the other there is security and trust. Black and white. I want neither and I want both. How can one thing feel so good and not in the next second? I have what I want. I had what I wanted. 'It hurts to hurt someone.' But it's not over until it's over.

"The black slowly begins to trail away down this 3 month trek. I've been carrying checkerboards with specks of mistrust and miscommunication. Selfishness consumes the tone of my skin and engulfs the whites of my eyes. Trying to end something that I don't remember wanting to end previously. Why does it have to be like this? My eyes pierce suspicious walls I've been building. I can see out, no one can see in."

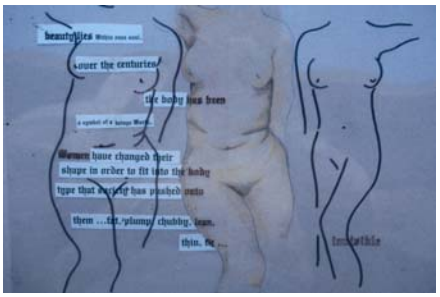
-Journal entry, 2-22-02

Researcher's comment –

The words written about the painting with eyes of 'two colors' extends well beyond a teenage girl's wordy, confused, poetic and romantic writing. Personal interviews and critiques concerning the work revealed that the painting focused on the traumatic event of her parents' divorce.

Elizabeth Bennet –

"It seems to me in my brief study of art history that women's bodies were seen as that which represented beauty.



"Now, it seems, my body is seen just as an object. Is mine so different from those of long ago? Was it always this way for women? Take a good look at me…I'm just a girl."

-Journal entry, 05-02

Researcher's comment –

The power of the piece lies in the knowledge that the figure depicted in the work is the artist's, an extremely timid, shy, and naïve person that epitomized that which is innocent. Yet, her courage to depict a cultural concern of the objectivity of women was important enough for her to display and address in a most courageous, brave, and bold manner possible. This work is a clear example of a student driven to make a serious social commentary apart and away from any classroom assignment.

Sophie Stephens –

"I could not have been more fragmented. The suicide of my English was so confusing. His life, that I had valued so much, was thrown away.

Now, he seems forgettable. I am the one broken. I had to address the event. The artwork helped heal me and bring me back together."

-Journal entry, 10-01

Researcher's comment –

The tragic suicide of the English teacher had a devastating affect on many students and teachers, especially considering that it followed by one week the suicide of two students who took their lives on the same week-end, just a few weeks after the research began. The resiliency displayed by Sophie was a lesson to anyone. After she completed the work, she completed work that dealt with the other deaths. Once completed, she never again talked about the works, or the subject of the works. The

image is a self-portrait on the obituary section of the newspaper. The English teacher's obituary can be seen just between her eyes.

Margie Ferrantti –

"The work is about abuse…different kinds of abuse. My home life is not pleasant, and I feel helpless."

-Journal Entry, Spring '02

Researcher's comment –

Margie never divulged the abuse she spoke of. Her art dealt with, it appeared, physical abuse and abortion. I can only assume she was the subject of her work. She never spoke of the artwork making her feel better, but she thanked me for giving her the opportunity for self-expression many times late in the research project.

Nic Phan –

"I am forced by my parents to live the culture of their homeland when I am at home. I try to live the life a typical teenager at school. No one knows what I go through.

"I have begged my teachers not to make me deal with personal and cultural issues in my class projects in many subjects. But in this art piece and with most of my art, I deal with the complexities of my inner self and how I am culturally torn."

-Journal entry, 01-02

Researcher's comment –

"Nic has mentioned to me many times the motivation for addressing the content of his art. His parents did not want him to do artwork or consider art as a career. His images are frightening. He says his insides are all torn up. He wants to be an American…his parents never will. His loyalties were always in question. He was the Valedictorian of his class."

-Journal entry, June '02

Summative Statements

All eight participants of the study completed the study, each assembling a portfolio based on their design, rationales, objectives, and goals. Based on my own professional judgments as well as those of the participants, The results of the study indicate that:

-Each portfolio was higher in imaginative and aesthetic quality than work prior to the experiment.

-Each member of the voiced satisfaction in claiming legitimate ownership of their work and realized a sense of authentic and genuine creativity with their work.

-Each voiced positive perceptions of high self-esteem.

-The G8 voluntarily and spontaneously created a physical working environment separate from their former workspaces. In turn, a group, or community of learners was created upon which the participants relied, supported, and challenged ideas and any problems encountered with media, execution of works, and content without interference or direct influence from the researcher.

-Each member of the group was better able to verbally express personal ideas of their work, as well as understand meanings of the works of others.

-A comparison of the efficient productivity of the participants of study prior to the experiment revealed a significant increase in artistic productivity.

-Every participant of the study voiced a disappointment that the experiment had to come to an end.

-The G8 yielded works with unpredictable results, raised questions about the intuitively inconclusiveness of the work, and supported a proposal that the expression of their works extended beyond the mere object of the work itself.

-The G8 had sufficient mechanical skills and knowledge to explore personal inquiry within a variety of media.

-The G8 had adequate animated and creative writing skills to explain and describe a series of recordings concerning their thoughts, ideas, experiences and personal expressions as related to their work during the experiment.

-The G8 questioned the existing environmental and curricular conditions of the educational setting. I had clear indications that their culture overpowered and subdued the existing curriculum, which raised questions in my mind concerning the thoroughness and optimal practicability of the existing curriculum as meeting the needs of the students. In fact, questions were raised in my mind about the curriculum meeting my needs rather than those of the students.

-The G8 challenged notions of artistic learning and creativity in an environment of isolation. In its place, the participants in the experiment promoted the idea of drawing power from human interrelation. To that end, the study of the G8 supported the concept of bringing together a creative mix of ideas and individuals that interacted to provoke, evoke, stimulate, and inspire. Further, the methodologies and art created by the G8 during the study embraced the very essence of the artistic education I had always sought to promote…making art that modifies thinking, challenges traditional practice, and even promoted debate. The processes of making art in the community

of the G8 was fueled by its own interaction with each other and their ideas within the environment they created, as well as various media and disciplines. The study made possible for the participants an exchange and exposure to new ideas and their own rigorous evaluation processes which altered their perspectives of learning in the visual arts.

Creativity as a Learning Tool

Their learning processes took on many forms…reading, writing, listening, looking, making, and speaking. It became apparent to me, toward the end of the experiment that creativity was the most powerful path to learning for the G8. The experiences of making art became the means to becoming informed, thoughtful, and prepared to find solutions to a complex and unpredictable culture. The effect of the study places an importance and commitment to the idea of concept with context, theory with practice, and individual expression with collective well-being. The students participating in the study promoted the notion that during stages of artistic development and growth, a proper understanding of authentic creativity and genuine ownership of one's work occur when the maker is the first cause of the work. Once the experiment started, I was removed as the first cause of the student's work. It is true that I continued to give advice, direction, and counseling concerning the strengths and weaknesses of students' work, but the inititial ideas and methodologies for completing all the work generated by the G8 during the study was initiated by the students. Journal entries indicate that they had no problem with post-modernistic ideology of deconstructing a

previously known concept or fundamental structure of a method. The G8 students perceived authentic creativity as dismantling then reformulating their world, which could come only from them, not the reinventing or replicated of ideas originally generated by others.

Ultimately, all eight participants of the study voiced positive statements about high self-esteem because they felt an ownership to their work. Regardless of how unpleasant or objectionable, the G8 was willing to travel on the road of learning while raising, at times, unanswerable questions concerning themselves, their art, me, and curriculum through their creative processes. It was their experiment with the truth. Their question to me, indeed to the existing education environment, dealt with a fundamental premise of learning in that students will always have difficulties in learning with little or no self-edification as long as the teacher promotes the notion of wanting results rather than answers. Further, the study suggests that no improvement that takes place within the human ecology of educational environment, with the student, or with the instructor, can be confined to itself…each a representative, identification, and expression to each. The respective learning modification of the one, it seems, will be mutually realized and in proportion of the other (Macmurray, 1999); student learning and the environment in which they learn is a direct link reciprocally proportionate to the limitations of the teacher (Dewey, 1934).

The G8 found themselves bonding theory and practice, thinking and making on their terms, connecting their various creative ideas and media to each other and to the broader issues of their personal lives and their culture.

> "suddenly, I felt the responsibility learning how to work with my own ideas. I had to figure out what it took to make them real. In work after work, I was charged to push the limits of myself, the media I was working with, to experiment and even to fail. But then, others began to challenge me. Sophie told me I was too timid…that I should, just one time, pretend I was all alone in a room by myself, that I could say or do anything that no one would ever hear or see, to think about anything that connected to my own world, then do something visual with those thoughts, and share those thoughts in and through my art. I was really scared. I began to understand that the idea was never enough…I had to know and say why (he wanted me to tell him why…they wanted me to be able to tell why my art was the way it was). I needed to discover the reasons behind my work if I was to call it my own. That's when I started to learn."
>
> - Margie Ferrantti

The G8's work was under constant scrutiny by the others in the group. They ended up relating to a lot of the different ideas, strengths, and weaknesses of the others. They were fueled by their own interaction with each other. The G8 had the very unique opportunity of benefiting from two distinctly different, but complementary, elements within their educational environment. One, regardless of the fact that they had designed their own program of study, as one of my students; the other as part of a community sharing the same goals and objectives to help complete their individual works. One was associated with tradition, the other more alternative. They were in a world vibrant with an open exchange of ideas. They were about being same only in their focus of thinking and using imagination. They brought their worlds into the classroom, and their art became their voice….in so doing, they gave a voice to others.

Convention of the Educational Setting/Situation

The members of the G8 were not opposed to conventional approaches in rendering their works. Indeed, much of their work was not that far removed from what casual observers might see as classroom assignments. However, their sudden departure from normal classroom activities indicate that in the educational setting in which the study was conducted, danger arose in those perfectly acceptable tendencies of operating the program in same manner year after year without a balance of allowing students to experiment on their own became excessive.

Figure 4-110. Stephanie Wonder working in the interior art studio

Figure 4-111. Stella Ward in the painting studio

In many regards, the study indicating that I had lost contact with my advanced students, and that I simply wanted control of all aspects in the educational setting from the actual environment to the student's work.

The study indicates that my chief difficulty as a teacher was not getting students to do an adequate amount of work rather than what appeared to center on my lack of sensitivity toward my students. I recognized them and all of their outwardly unique talents, but I did not perceive them as individuals. I simply did not give them a sufficient amount of the kind of attention they needed, thus I remained unattached to them and emotionally distant. Students were part of my surroundings, but not my environment. Until the conversation about artistic intent with Stella Ward, they did not represent a force that caused me to vary my actions. I simply had little or no

appreciation for my students as sensitive human beings, but as viable technicians only.

The results of the study clearly indicate the importance of placing theory into practice. Theories are tools, nothing more and they must be employed in order to work (Jackson, 1998). The study offered clear indicators to me that my pedagogical practice needed repair. The value of the G8 is in the realizations that the group aroused discontent with existing conditions in the curriculum and the educational setting. They created a demand for surroundings that met their level of learning, and they revealed a depth and range of thinking of meaning in experiences which otherwise might have remained mediocre and trivial.

The G8 represented what Dewey called accessories of vision, and in their fullness the concentration and consummation of elements of excellence, which were otherwise scattered or incomplete (Dewey, MW9, Democracy and Education, 1916). The G8 did for the curriculum and for me what their art was finally allowed to do for them. Beyond merely permitting art to awaken or reawaken them to the delights of the commonplace and to the wonder and beauty that appeared in ordinary objects and everyday scenes, the G8 explored and examined the beauty of living, and all its ugliness, wonder, doubt, surprises, and splendor within themselves and had the courage to share those discoveries with others. In so doing, they understood a little more of what it means to be more human and the value of their own humanness.

Self-esteem

> "An understanding of human limitations…in admiration of whatever we believe lies outside our control….capacity for admiration brings with it a capacity for respecting fellow human beings regardless of their age. The teenagers voice is just as valid in the community as anyone else's."
>
> -Personal journey entry (Jun '02)

Prior to the study, the work of the G8 was good work. They were inventive and they showed mastery of knowledge and skills. If they did not see expansion in me they did not see expansion in themselves. I think in some respects they wanted control. And while that may sound anarchistic, I now understand that it was a positive aspect of wanting to be an artist. They had proven themselves and the results of their work during the experiment forced the curriculum to expand to themselves…and, with that brought the death of my old self as a teacher to my new self as a teacher. They entered their new world armed the mastery of skills, but deficient in communicative skills involving human interaction, opening exchanging ideas, challenging others. The experiment allowed them to experiment with human interaction, test their courage for displaying provocative work, and show some of what was part of their inner self, not merely their outer selves. They saw themselves as making their own shadows, and accepted the responsibilities that come with accountable decision making, meeting self-designed curricular objectives, and accepting a shift to the role of a student-centered course of study from one teacher previously seen as teacher-centered. Self-esteem was an effect rather than a cause for high achievement.

Conclusion

As it is with Dewey's definition of art, to "challenge the existing conditions," the G8, after a hesitant beginning, did just that. Their work was an indication that I had been manipulating the conventional ways and means of artistic development assuming that the students could be artists some time in the future…not realizing that their personal artistic journeys could begin now.

While the earlier work was rendered really well, little if any of the work had any intrinsic value, was challenging or confrontational, never challenged existing conditions whether personally or externally, and had no emotional attachment or investment. The journal writing had an impact on the outward visual work. Students had a clearer understanding of their work, why they were doing it, were better able to analyze the work of others, and their work showed visual improvement with each passing month. Their work became more and showed more internal struggle as the experiment progressed.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSIONS AND SUMMATIVE CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

An interest in extending what is known about the relationship of self-directed learning and achievement motivated this qualitative action-research study. Additionally, this study investigated the possible and potential changes of secondary art students' perspectives and gaining clarity regarding an understanding concerning originality and creativity; explored and compared ideological differences between traditional versus progressive learning and teaching methodologies in visual arts studies; and, investigated potentially beneficial factors of learner edification from an educational setting sustained and enhanced by community interaction. Data used for the analyses reported in Chapter IV were drawn from the results and investigation of student art works, observations, in-depth interviews, and inspections of personal journals maintained throughout the duration of the study.

A discussion concerning an assertion, which claims that artist's intent in association with a personal aesthetic interest is a crucial element in determining that something qualifies as a candidate as a work of art, filters through the study and provides relevant implications to the field of visual arts. Moreover, the study offers an argument in which community based and/or supported learning activities make available channels for strength and nurturing not only for individualized innovation,

but for artistic faculty, as well. The study locates the educational principle that through the deepening power of creative work comes open doors for positive change within learning communities. The study places an emphasis on the idea of integration: concept with context, theory with practice, and ultimately, individual expression with the idea of collective well-being, and that self-esteem, perhaps a critical component for learning, can be an effect rather than cause for achievement.

The theoretical framework supporting this study reflects contemporary research pertaining to creativity, visual arts education, gifted and talented, paradigmatic research, metaphysical reasoning, and accepted present-day philosophies of art. The research design involved observations of an experiment in which high school students designed and put into practice their own programs of study for an advanced secondary level studio art course. Primary sources of data in the research design were a number of in-depth interviews with the participants, analyses of documents and personal journals maintained by the members of the group, appraisals of artworks created by the participants, as well as reflections, ideas, thoughts, and personal commentary from my own personal journals. The research has implications for practitioners and those involved and interested in artistic design of curriculum and instruction in numerous fields of study. Further, the study should promote inquiry by those concerned with and endorsing creativity and with addressing the needs of the gifted and talented in a variety of educational settings.

The conclusions of this study are based on the results and analyses of those matters stated above and are subject to the delimitations discussed in Chapter I.

These conclusions are considered separately as answers to the research questions outlined in Chapter III. Implications will be presented during the concluding discussions drawn from the data of the research.

Congruous with my duties as a full time secondary visual arts instructor, the study initially focused on exploring one essential question, as stated below. During the attempt to answer that question, other questions materialized and led to multiple issues and insights that directly affected my teaching methodologies, personal and philosophical thoughts concerning my perceptions and appreciations of visual art, as well as cultural and social understandings of my students. Additionally, an overall awareness of gifted education and an understanding regarding the importance of genuine creativity became a principal curricular concern during the study when both my students and I experienced role reversals. As a student of those I taught, I better understood concepts of learning for not only them, but for myself, as well.

Questions of the Study

Early in the study an unwavering link of the limitations of student learning to those of my own pedagogical practices was exposed. Dewey (1902) acknowledged that to the degree the teacher's understanding is mechanical, superficial, and restricted, the student's appreciation will be correspondingly limited and perverted. This principle suggests that student learning is directly dependent upon the intellectual and educational capacity and techniques of the teacher. With that thought in mind, it is interesting to note that early in the study the primary question of the

research shifted away from whether or not students beneficially could design their own program of study, and refocused on the notion of a braiding together the practice of my own directive style of teaching to that of a learner-centered viewpoint. In so doing, attempts to understand the learners from their perspective (their thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about self and about school, as well as allowing for their own learner directed education) provided new insights for me. As the study developed, I became more able to understand how active, in-depth learning could be organized around common goals of both the student and myself. Further, I discovered how the students were better able to focus on authentic invention, their own personal learning development and a true appreciation for a diversity of ideas.

The question motivating the experiment and the initial purpose of the study was to determine possible changes or modifications of student perspectives of learning when given the opportunity to design their own program of study separate from the existing curriculum under which they previously had studied. The study led to the following critical insights:

First, with an involvement in imaginative curriculum design and a subsequent cause of achievement comes a realization of higher self-esteem;

Second, the study provided a fresh understanding of authentic creativity for the students involved in the study;

Third, individual creativity is perhaps better realized within a community of inquiry where all members of the community stand on common ground; and,

Fourth, a concern and question arose of whether the practice of merely developing mechanical and technical skills actually falls within the dominion of genuine self-edification, or merely, as Dewey (1902) stated, “within the principle of manual training.”

Fifth, the study shed light on a concept that instructing a culture better known for its unpredictability into a predictable curriculum is difficult if not futile. Consequently, and as a result of these considerations, essential inquiries come to light from the study, such as questioning the real purpose of secondary art education for those desiring to pursue the field of visual art in higher education and as a career. The study of the G8 suggests that educational integrity be about helping students develop a sense of connection to individual fulfillment within a framework of appropriate purpose (Gardner, 1961/1984) and that true achievement, as it became apparent to me from the study (at least in the context of understanding gifted education), can proceed only when students involve themselves in progressive learning causes that conceivably surpass instruction and to design a method of curricular study for which that specific concept is allowed. Thus, the study questions whether in-depth learning and education actually begins when questions cannot be answered within an established curriculum.

Perspectives for Considering the Results

The G8 challenged conditions, became unsettled and even angry about how they saw existing conditions. Before, while not fulfilled, they never really complained about their educational situation.

Because reality is culture dependent, it changes over time, as cultures do, and varies from community to community. Knowledge is not eternal. There are "enduring interests" (Dewey, 1934) which point to a degree of continuity, and there are some commonalities from culture to culture.

To deny continuity and commonality where it in fact exists is as irrational and un-pragmatic as to see knowledge as eternal. It betrays an attachment to such values as innovation, originality, and diversity. To do so could have unfortunate consequences in visual arts studies. It is one thing to reject the idea of a fixed, universal foundation to the reality of what constitutes a quality work of art, quite another to claim that no useful guidelines can ever be identified. Artists still need some foundational skills to operate efficiently. This study was not about abandoning the traditional values and convention of artistic development. It was, on the other hand, about expanding the metaphysics, ontology, and epistemology of an artistic educational setting, which assumed that the setting was not a fixed universal reality and promoted a methodology of inquiry. The G8 exemplified a culture fragmented and ever changing, needing stability wherever and however they could find it. Their inquiry into intellectual and moral issues was a legitimate form of metaphysics. Teenagers have a legitimate voice, if not the primary voice, of the influential impact of a culture. Was it the individual members of the experiment who spoke, or their culture, which spoke through them? Rorty (1990) described the self as a network of beliefs, desires, and emotions of the community, which readjust themselves to meet the pressures of the environment.

I saw the insight of the G8 as requiring a shift in their conception and method of inquiry. They did not see themselves as seeking to uncover a pre-existing reality, rather they were about the business of an interactive process of knowledge creation on their terms. They developed a working understanding of their own reality and life which suited their purposes. In doing so, because purposes and context vary from individual to individual, what they arrived at is in part autobiographical, reflecting their personal narrative, their own particular secret place in the world. Their results of the study yielded, consequently, unpredictable outcomes, which in turn promoted a dialogue or conversation within their group, and with me where there was mutual influence rather than simple transmission of skills and technique from one to the other. Teaching, within the G8, from the G8, to the G8, to me, and by me, so long as it was dialogical, was both possible and necessary.

The G8 undertook a struggle with basic issues of how humans survive and finding meaning in life. While it is true that teenagers typically undertake such notions, that doesn't diminish the fact that the G8 needed be seen and identified as needing individual research of their own. Their work mirrored their efforts in questioning, observing, theorizing, and trying to understand life in their personal and unique situations. Every member of the G8 was seen as a center of an individual scholarship, but in the experiment compared notes on equal terms with other individuals.

The results of the study taught the lesson to me as a practitioner in the world of education that I needed to realize the importance of tailoring the ideas of curriculum and instruction to somehow make adjustments to student's values and interests. I do

not, as I examine the journals and work of the participants of the study, advocate constantly breaking the mold of convention, but I do see problems in not addressing or questioning a perpetual like-minded and single-minded reinforcement of convention. Otherwise, how can the curriculum in the field of Visual Arts Studies expand? The study emphasized an increase of teacher/student co-development and a learning together process, rather than one telling the other in a top-down method. The G8 saw it as necessary both so that values and interests of students are taken into account, but so that the wealth of their everyday experience is made available to fellow students and to the teacher.

The study was not about giving students learning skills and then setting them loose. The G8 demonstrated a need for ongoing encouragement and help in operating in their setting. If anything they demonstrated a glaring shortcoming of their contemporary culture that they are too dependent on adult help. I needed, on the other hand, help from the students in order to learn about their culture. Their lesson to me was one of simply giving them support they needed and allowing them to make significant input and having an optimal control over their learning. Through dialogue, we shared information, examples, stories, feelings, ideas, theories, discontent, and happiness. The G8 demonstrated a desire in having a major say in how they wanted their learning structured. They demonstrated a democratic approach to inquiry. They were not interested in a fixed education. They wanted to combat foundationalism, yet promoted and began developing foundations for life and their future education in studying various forms of learning like the worth of individualism

and family. In that way, they tailored their learning to suit individual needs and that of their diverse group as well. They promoted the idea of exploring the different categories that people have in common as an important aspect of educational studies.

My job as a teacher became one of enabling the group to see that many of us grapple with same issues, and to promote conversation largely as equals. My realization from the study is to promote the idea that students should not refrain from saying or writing what they think, but to promote an idea of feeling to do so strongly and honestly, and intellectually.

The results of the study promoted the notion for a replacement of a scientific method that generates objective knowledge (elements of art) with that which embraces unique individual experience, his or her ability to see things from the perspectives of others, and conviction in the importance of particular personal issues…as opposed to the large-scale one size fits all plans and methods. Burbules and Rice (2000) tell us that contemporary issues in education call for "communicative virtues" that will facilitate dialogue across differences:

> …tolerance, patience, respect for differences, a willingness to listen, the inclination to admit that one is mistaken, the ability to reinterpret or translate one's own concerns in a way that makes them comprehensible to others, the self-imposition of restraint in order that others may speak, and the disposition to express one's self honestly and sincerely.

It is true that the study generated confusion among the participants and with me. However, communicative capabilities among the G8 provide tiny anchors in that confusion, and provided a justification for me to continue the educational experiment,

which at first was not much more than the form of conversations when the participants were losing their sense of certainty in the results of inquiry.

The intriguing question that the G8 produced shortly after the experiment was initiated was one that simply asked what can be done differently with their education? I do think that the experiment offered new possibilities: that people can learn to talk to each other without trying to get the upper hand through appeal to superior knowledge; and that teachers can speak to students on the basis of equality, not because we and they are the same, but because each of us is different, and therefore each is limited in the ability to prescribe to the other (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

The experiment allowed for a much wider range of truths. Once I was no longer pre-occupied with driving out what I perceived as falsehoods in the daily work habits of the students, the communicative virtues of honesty and sincerity no longer involved students second-guessing their own communications by combing them for evidence of possible falsehoods. The students gained the support from me and fellow students in probing their communications for hidden truths that methodological believing brought to awareness. Their commitment to the intrinsic value of conversation meant no longer subjecting our conversations to external tests of their productivity. Because of the communicative openness of the G8, any attempts to exclude others by intellectual ranking or skill were non-existent.

The methodologies of this study were predicated on the following assumptions which ultimately emerged from final analyses of interviews regarding the study and

the relationship of the conventional curriculum prior to the study to that which more clearly reflect progressive desires and learning needs of the G8:

- They wanted to be story tellers
- They wanted to avoid coercion and pressure.
- They were sensitive to context
- They valued subjective experience
- They embraced a notion of genuine creativity, while at the same time found the current curriculum predetermined version of it objectionable.
- They valued togetherness, that it was rare, precious, and elusive.
- They were skeptical of certainty
- They were cynical, and suspicious of their existing education system
- They wanted to address issues never before discussed or not allowed to discuss.
- They wanted to be more experiential
- They wanted to be more dramatic with their work
- They wanted to reassert the value of community.
- They wanted to address why so many revere the material parts of our culture, but still feel shallow and empty.

Further, the experiment promoted a consideration for a more progressive methodological approach for the existing course of study. The participants of this study seem to suggest a need to consider curricular changes, which endorse a preference for a change from:

-**replication to diversity**…from duplicating the particular to the bringing together of variety.

-**performing to learning**…shifting a focus from the end result to the process. In their efforts and struggles of finding themselves, the G8 were not afraid of offending others along the way.

-**production to individuals**…moving from the known to the new and experimental. The G8 did not want to be as operating in an industrial age system.

-**deficiency to abundance**…from a posture of control or being controlled to creating space for others' ideas, as well as their own.

-**top down to level**…moving from authoritarian leadership to collaboration and teamwork.

-**segregation to enclosure**…focusing on what drew them together rather than on what separated them.

-**mechanical achievement to understanding**…from trying to change others to sharing with others.

-**customer to steward**…from consuming to a desire to act responsibly.

Instructional theory versus practice; practice versus implementation

Prior to the experiment, the instructional guidelines within the educational setting of the experiment bordered on a scientific model, one in which emphases of procedures and processes focused on product; an indication of good instruction could always be identified in how the end result looked. The experiment revealed however,

a gap in learning conditions. Where precisely was the content? Did the content actually exist in the instructional objectives only, or in the viewer's mind (Reigeluth, 1983,1987)? Was the content of the work rooted in the process of the work, the instructional activities, or with those engaged in the instructional activities? Actually, the proper question asked by the G8 was if content existed at all?

Prior to the study, the objectives and strategies of the learning environment had clear, unproblematic, unambiguous ontological status. The instructional strategies were actually being followed too well, with regard to intrinsic content. The instructional guidelines adhered to a strict set rules, and placed expertise or knowledge into the rule-based system. The advantage of that kind of instructional approach is that knowledge can be regulated, owned, controlled, and communicated unambiguously to students. The down side of this is that little or no room remains in the learning environment for advanced students to improvise, be spontaneous, be autonomous, or practice the art of being self-expressive artists. The results of the experiment suggested that the instructional format prior to the study attempted to define content through standard objects and tasks analysis. Further, an over-reliance on objectives and goals easily led to failed instruction…there is more to it than what is written down in a text. The G8 needed to have experiences that placed them in a position where they could learn who they were and better express those discoveries through their work, than what they were merely going through the mechanical motions of producing visually pleasing non-objective works of art.

When the study began, I did not know exactly what would be learned, nor did the participants. All we knew for sure was that the educational setting prior to the study was sterile and under the control of a traditional disciplined based system of learning. Students were taught only targeted objectives, and the learners failed in learning how to be what the system wanted them to be. They learned some things, of course. But the system was indicating to all of us involved in the experiment that it would fail teaching the role it was asking students to eventually play in a real world of practice.

What the experiment essentially did, was to take an assumed instructional design and remove it to a time and place outside the context of expected practice to one where the design, practice and result was unexpected and unpredictable in order to expose strengths and weaknesses of the existing instructional design, and the implementation of that design. It was when the G8 participated in the design of their own program of study the instructional design became more unproblematic. Prior to the study, the instructional design failed to include implementation factors and failed to achieve an active interaction between theory and practice that kept both fresh.

The instructional design prior to the study neglected social cognition and cultural variables, and had a poor design for problem solving outcomes. The study suggests that instructional design must be continuously updated and embrace an ever-changing world. The study revealed gaps in the existing curriculum. The participants of the study revealed methods to fill the gaps: Based on an analysis of journal entries and an interpretive investigation of their work, the results of the group's involvement in designing their own program of study held to the following ideas (Wilson, 2003):

- The G8 were willing to break the rules.
- The G8 placed principle above procedure, and people above principle.
- All members of the group were involved in the new instructional design and developmental processes.

Based on the results of the study the G8 determined that pervasive influential metaphors referring to the delivery of instruction, e.g., learning prerequisites, systems designs, instructional feedback, learning environments, etc., were not necessary or even to be considered. While such metaphors are necessary for educational thinking, alternative ways of seeing may be restricted.

Community Supported Learning

Is artistic creativity and genuine learning found in a fundamental aptitude? Or, is it as likely to be found within a curriculum design that fosters a quality learning existence in the classroom? Answers to these questions began to unfold when I discovered the concealed voices of the students during the study. Early on in the experiment, I quickly became aware of my own shortcomings as a teacher when members of the G8 began bringing in well rendered and marvelously creatively works that they had kept hidden from me. With the study and the establishment of the G8 came opportunities for these students to bring the unsaid to awareness, and a clear channel for their search of making meaning of their educational experiences (Foshay, p.60).

The study generated an unexpected occurrence. The self-directed aspect of the research in which I had anticipated intense and focused individual involvement actually led directly to the establishment of a sort of sub-culture within the classroom, which I later categorized as a community of learners. Almost immediately after the experiment began the students voluntarily removed themselves from the other class members and sought out their own work areas to create, claim, and personalize what they would later call studio space. Their work areas became littered with evidence of an engaging paradox: part museum to adolescence, part laboratory of the future…with glamour and sports magazines, CD players, and hairbrushes were Latin-English dictionaries, calculus books, tubes of oil paint, 1" x 2" pine boards, rolls of unprimed canvas, and books from Dostoevsky and Hawthorne to images from Klimt, Degas, Picasso, Dali, and Van Gogh randomly scattered about.

Their areas became a collage of their interests, development, and growth, a time capsule of their current interests rich with more telling evidence of their culture than can properly be described.

Figure 130. Stephanie Wonder in the painting studio.

Most revealing of all is what their work areas said not just about who they were, but what they needed. Their work areas, never before in existence prior to the study, quickly spoke to that which, at least in their minds, was about reflecting what counted in their worlds with no reference to any imposed meaning of where I wanted them to be in the curriculum or in their artistic development…or to the predictable environment in which they had previously worked. Early in the study their work areas evolved into personalized work places which had individual meaning to them, not for me. I can best describe their work places as what outwardly appeared as places of disorder and confusion, but certainly not of emptiness, or meaningless clutter.

In a world propelled by technology, global commerce, and social change, the G8 students were no longer being constrained by the conventional school structures within which to develop and distribute their work and ideas. They did not define themselves in terms of a single medium or art form or function as they had earlier. They were not dependent on traditional measures of success; and they did not accept a barrier between high art and their current pop culture.

The students participating in the experiment revealed what perhaps was a universal appeal for a community. Journal entries suggest that the students who ultimately embodied the G8 were on the verge of dropping art from their schedules because their individual inventiveness was not being challenged and, secondly, because they felt an escape unlikely from a fundamentalist system of learning in which the art program

and curriculum was seen as having the final and unique answers. Further, the group saw me as analogous to the art program. In an interview conducted after the experiment about the reasons for the successes of the experiment, one member of the G8 stated:

> "You were the curriculum…we saw you as the program. And we were saturated with the program. We felt that all you could offer was new ways of doing or approaching that which eventually accomplished the same tasks. We already knew about the elements of art. We became robotic in our renderings.
>
> "Then you gave us freedom. You gave us an opening to challenge our own creativity and make our own decisions and the opportunity to be pragmatic with consequences of our own causes and effects. We had been placed in the unique position of being able to invent and experiment extemporaneously, away from the established program, which was, of course, you."
>
> (Stella Ward - Jan '04)

Once the G8 was given the clearance and leverage to operate, a new system that embraced an approach of whatever worked for them in the light of the present knowledge was accepted. The improvisational flexibility of the group demanded a continuous questioning of the curricular parameters acceptable to secondary art education. The group's refusal to operate under any form of a fundamentalist program of learning and/or teaching that had formerly been in place put me as the teacher and researcher of the same students in a peculiar situation. With the new possibilities of discovery and learning being developed and changing as rapidly as there were throughout the study, I needed feedback often and abundantly from each member of the G8 and they from me. Each person involved in the experiment, myself included, placed great value upon the voices of the others (Eno, 1997).

Despite the generally accepted and overly romanticized notion that artists thrive in an environment of isolation, even to a point where the artist is admired for being misunderstood, neglected, emotionally distant, and abandoned, the study of the Group of Eight suggested otherwise, at least in an educational setting. Observations of individual members of the G8 seem to indicate that the idealization of alienation where the disvalued and socially rejected artist is most creative in an environment of self-imposed suffering, alone in social isolation, is, in the context of this study, a myth. Although it may be true that beginning artists, especially those of high school age, may not receive the affection bestowed to others by a school population, the study concerning the G8 testified to social engagement as supportive of individual creativity.

Ultimately, what the study uncovered and exposed were gaps in an existing visual arts curriculum in which opportunities to pursue individualized self-directed study in a community setting with like-minded others, where an emphasis and commitment is placed on experimentation and interdisciplinary thinking, were not evident. Specifically, what the participants of the research experiment advocated were:

- personally designed disciplinary courses of study emphasizing a development of ideas based upon their existing advanced skills in primarily one thematic area of concentration;
- personally designed interdisciplinary courses of study (not only traditional studio courses such as painting, drawing and photography but music, literature, history, performing arts, visual art disciplines and methods,

mathematics, as well) that emphasizes the development of ideas and advanced skills in a combination of related studio skills;

- courses of study designed to emphasize the development of ideas and the realization of work that combines multiple studio disciplines to create work distinguished by its interdisciplinary nature; personally designed courses of study designed to emphasize the development and exchange of ideas, challenges, suggestions and proposal within a learning community of inquiry.

Creativity and Aesthetic Interest

Everything must have a beginning and that beginning must be linked to something that occurred earlier. Invention in the truest sense of the word, or authentic creativity it must be acknowledged, does not consist in creating out of void, but out of substance, even if that substance is chaotic. The materials, in the first place must be available. They can give form to dark, shapeless substances, but they cannot bring into being the substance itself. In all matters of discovery and invention, even those central to the imagination, a question will always exist about the origin or catalyst of a thought or design. Invention consists in the ability of seizing on the capabilities of a subject, and in the power of forming and expressing ideas and existing knowledge suggested to it (Shelley, 1931).

Critiques

It is appropriate and all together fitting to address the issue and provocative task of conducting critiques and participating in the analysis of art as, perhaps, a necessary function for artistic growth both for the proper use and development of artistic skills, the argument and philosophical approach of artistic intent, and the artist's personal aesthetic interest concerning the appropriate creative rendering of a particular work and its content. Prior to the experiment, I had advocated the notion that no artistic activity is possible in the absence of a positive or negative motive, not only in the process of rendering a work of art, but in the process of assessing a work of art, as well. In the analysis of the work, motives also exist, positively or negatively, which influence not only how the critique may be conducted, but also in the quality and thoroughness of the discussion of the work.

Critiques became, in a way, the control mechanism through which or by which the channel of genuine unguarded communication was established for the G8. It can be argued that critiques became the instrument for discipline and that the G8 was under the influence of observation and measurement; even after open communication had been established, a standardization of sorts. However, while in the past the critique sessions whether individual or conduced in a group setting had been teacher controlled, directed, and induced, they now were many times initiated by the students almost on a daily basis. Journal entries of several members of the G8 indicated that, prior to their existence as a group, individual critiques where confusing and avoided, always in the end being teacher controlled to a point where the artwork was being

manipulated by the teacher. (The intended use of the term 'critique' as a verb in this study is "to review or discuss critically" and meant to be neutral somewhere between praise and censure or disapproval. The term was often seen and misinterpreted by the G8 in a negative sense. One can usually substitute *go over, review,* or *analyze* in the context of this study.)

The G8, with newly formed community strength, the elimination of any limitations of method or content combined with the protected anonymity of the study, securely and boldly explored individual interests without a fear of consequence and thus became not only better at examining and analyzing their work independently, but were better able to intelligently discuss their work openly and freely. Consequently, the visual art curriculum which they engaged expanded. Accordingly, their comprehensions of self were easier translated visually.

Artistic Development

For the first time, the group became more synchronous in their development as student artists. The classroom activities which had previously reflected a fear of non-approval in not only their less than complete and open discussions during critiques with me, which in turn not only influenced and affected their own self-satisfaction and personal rewards with their work, but their relationships with the others in the group as well, had been replaced with personal gratification and a mutual group compatibility. The expectations in their relationships with each other had changed from that of being disengaged to one of completion through a caring and

understanding from other group members. In return, their caring was reciprocated. They exhibited an atmosphere of contentment that had been lacking in their learning. Before, they had seen their existence as threatening, being dominating by others and in a manner of speaking, fearful of their own personal existence as either an inferior and unqualified developing artist, or of possessing insufficient artistic skills whose work did not merit enough satisfactory responses from me or others.

> The mechanical skill level exhibited by a person for the purpose of rendering art, does not necessarily determine the intellectual level of their artistic ability.
>
> - Personal Journal entry, 03-03-02

During the third month of the experiment, I spoke to the G8 group asking each member to measure the progress of completing their portfolios and to perform a status check on how they had altered their approaches as a student, as an artist, and in their relationship to me as their teacher. During that discussion, I apologized to the group for not recognizing and allowing their giftedness to flourish. They were changing, not only in the intellectual approaches to their work, but outward personal appearances as well. They began, I suspect because of new responsibilities and personally accountable programs of study, to take on the look of older more mature students. As a result of that discussion, the outward communicative expressions of the student behavior toward me improved significantly, subsequently, the individual critique sessions concerning the manners and matters of each member's artwork became more productive.

Where the reciprocity of feelings toward me was once negative, it now became positive. Forbearance and forgiveness, it seemed, were necessities of positive student activities and teacher relationships (Macmurray, p.74). Positive contact with others was reciprocated.

> In my relationship with the members of the G8 and with individual members, reciprocity of negative motivations and feelings toward me may have been enforced. During critiques student responses to me on a personal level had always, I am now convinced, been incomplete and reserved. After my apology to them, it was apparent to me that I was seen as threatening and intimidating.
>
> During critiques, conversations were strained and awkward. Students would not disclose, and evidently not address personal, philosophical, or meaningful issues concerning their work. They had felt more comfortable addressing innocuous and superfluous issues. After my apology, they began to communicate more openly and honestly about their work, and began taking risks concerning content and uses of various media to better present and express their work.
>
> Accordingly, the critique sessions began to improve as well. My apology had become a bit of a catalyst to improved communication, and deeper commitment artistic expression.
>
> -personal journal entry, 2-02

The communicative power associated with student/teacher relationships between the G8 and me, as it is with the giftedness revealed corporately and individually within the group, could be identified as a social construction, but not a certainty. Indeed, the human ecology that existed during the experiment with the G8 was produced and cultivated, not discovered…it was never there. The dialogical and revelatory communication exhibited by the G8 in their formation of a community of inquiry gained its meaning, even its existence, from the interaction with each other. The artistic concepts and social structures of the G8 was influenced and built through

the social interaction of the group, not through the slow accumulation of facts from a pre-existing curricular entity, regardless of its empirical rationale (Borland, 1997). Further, the G8's understanding of power was no longer synonymous with, or took its form in what could be stated as the corporeal subjugation and oppression formerly associated with me. Instead, power within the group was represented and put into effect within a network of discourse and social interaction (Focault, 1995).

In many respects, the G8's internal knowledge of being observed and judged in the past influenced their behavior and how they communicated during the study. Members had the knowledge of being observed for the research experiment, but their interpretations of being observed were different from my own. They had always been observed, and their work had been monitored closely before the study. But the earlier observations were from the point of view that they adhere to the guidelines of the curriculum enforced by the teacher. During the study, I observed them from my point of view of how they operated as developing artists outside the parameters of a determined plan previously placed upon them. Critiques, in the minds of the G8, represented, during the first few months of the experiment, the vehicle of control and monitoring. However, as the experiment progressed into the winter and spring months of the school year, subsequent and later interviews with the G8 suggest that the almost daily and unscheduled individual critiques were not a medium though which power and control was enacted. At times, some members became somewhat belligerent, a characteristic which I later interpreted as developmentally healthy. They became defensive during the examination of their works. By the sixth month of

the experiment, each member seemed convinced that they had the freedom to function liberally and separate from my influence, as well as from the formal and routinely contrived deterministic critiques. They began operating, in regards to curriculum and instructional theory and developmental progress, with a more aggressive and progressive approach to their learning and growth as artists.

I remained convinced throughout the later part of the experiment that the appeal of the G8 came not from their knowledge of being observed or judged by their understanding of what the ever-present existence of the particular and discrete (not discreet) entity of the secondary art curriculum represented, that which was traditional, as they once had been, but through and by the external power of the state and symbolic trappings of the community of inquiry in which they spontaneously and unexpectedly had established on their own volition. The normalization of judgment, the aspect of exercising control over the G8 came not from a prefabricated format of predictability, or one in which the assimilation of each member of the group demonstrated a primary concern of purpose to not only complete the portfolio, but to obtain a high evaluation of the completed portfolio. Each member was set free from the established educational setting and curriculum of which they had all been a part, as well as the hegemonic tendencies and influence of my pedagogy. The study ultimately suggests that the control, motivation, productivity, and the high aesthetic interests exhibited by the G8 came from the unpredictability of their personally assembled community of inquiry.

The community of inquiry which the G8 established is one in which one would find great difficulty in conducting a quantifiable study where definitions of terms or values of abilities and differences in relations to established norms could be measured. The establishment of the group, much of the outcome and manner in which the members of the group operated was unpredictable, indeterministic, ambiguous, intentionally so it seemed, and led to further questions about what the members were doing and how they were doing it. Without any question they had clearly broken away from previously established class expectations of conduct and organization. Their work, and their approaches to their work bordered, in my mind, of never establishing logical conclusions as late as six months into the seven-month experiment. Eventually, their activities indicated an almost total break from what would be identified as a traditional educational setting. The community of inquiry came into existence and was established from a need of each member of the group to, apparently, break away from the structured entity of which they had been a part to address more diversely their own needs as learners and developers in the field of visual arts.

Eventually, students were allowed to bring to the table their own arguments during critiques, away from my influence which formerly been intrusive into their own needs of personal expression and had determined too many times the outcomes of their work. Possibly, the G8 established a model by which attention could be given to not only authentic creativity, but the learning needs for advanced secondary art students.

Prior to the study, I gave little or no regard to the effects of community relationships or to interactive and shared human experiences within the visual arts program. Before, I always had promoted the notion that successful art students should work in isolation without distraction to develop not only needed and appropriate skills, but that creativity could be enhanced as well. While perhaps and at the least partly true in particular conditions, a study of the creative behavior exhibited by the G8 challenged this opinion and endorsed a genuine belief that, even in its most individual elements, human behavior carries, perhaps in its inherent structure, a reference to relations with others. The idea of an individual as a personal entity in and of themselves is not within the self only (Macmurray, 1999), but in the individual's personal relationship with others; that we are persons not by individual accordance, but by virtue personal connections with others. As noted in Chapter IV, the areas of concentration of every participant in the experiment dealt with human condition or relation to others and supported the idea that regardless of how positive or negative, the personal is not, as Macmurray stated, " the 'I', but the 'You and I'" (p. 61).

Energy from Community Support

Where they once worked in practical isolation, now they worked in a leaderless group on common ground with an open exchange of ideas; the interaction within the group was remarkably active. Certainly, individual philosophical differences, whether artistic and social, must exist between individuals working in that which is

seen as group or team oriented tasks, as well as any inquiry within a community atmosphere where ideas are challenged and validated, confirmed or reconfirmed, or perhaps abandoned. Those differences were not only notable within the G8 they were promoted and revered. Within a community of inquiry rests the presentations and judgments of ideas and inventions, to be seen later as outward visual displays of intrinsic expressions of thought, or meant as metaphors of and for concepts otherwise known perhaps only to one unique individual. Be that as it may, an important aspect of the study was the apparent energy consistently devoted to the exchange of ideas, as well as the confrontations, disputes, encouragements, and challenges within the group membership that not only promoted but also resulted in a steady flow of personal creativeness.

Within the security of the G8 and with my removal from the authoritarian position of having final rulings concerning their works came episodes of daring individual judgments and decisions. Where a previous concern focused primarily with efficient productivity and the objective applications of final products, it became apparent that once the group was formed, creativity became a principal focus of rendering artwork and a familiar topic of discussion. Through collegial responses and reinforcements within the community, the group members transferred and translated ideas into form.

The responsive human interaction exhibited by the G8 implied, it seems, a primary human characteristic need for survival through their personal connections to each other and their necessity for creativity. Their interactive communications signaled awareness to the lack of but the need for caring they previously had been missing

from the curriculum (Noddings, 1984). The notion of caring among the G8 that came as a natural reaction to the relationship they had quickly established with each other once the experiment began was not an element of their educational setting prior to the study.

For the group, it was the exchange of imaginative ideas with other like-minded individuals, which allowed for the validation of their authentic expressions of creativity. Their supportive gestures toward each other seemed to symbolize a mutual happiness in the relation, which united them in their common goals and represented an understanding of the importance of communication. In the experiment in which they were participating, it appeared that the group had become not only a creative trigger for individual members, but also a symbolic caregiver for personal artistic and creative ventures. It became evident that the artistic development of the students in the experiment, as shown by the activities found under the particular circumstances in which they operated, was being established more rapidly because of their mutual interdependence of equals. Consequently, communication became the parent of their creativity, not a by-product of it (Macmurray, p. 63-67).

> They had claimed their real estate and took ownership of it as a test directed toward me, partly out of defiance, to determine what my definition of no-restrictions actually meant and to how determine just how withdrawn I had become. For me, it was a scary pedagogical moment. When the G8 removed themselves on their own accord from the others in the class, I felt in violation of my own profession. I had just handed over the reins of curriculum development to17 and 18 year old art students, albeit very gifted students, nevertheless, I might as well have given the keys to the car to inexperienced drivers, and placed my self, handcuffed and gagged in the back seat. In my mind, I was wondering how long it would be before the collision would occur…destroying the car, them and myself. -personal journal entry, 12-01

Student Growth and the Power of Dialogue

The Group of Eight students committed themselves to experimentation and interdisciplinary thinking. Although most of the students elected to work primarily in one studio area, each member of the G8 worked in proximity to and often persuaded by others to push the boundaries of their work and to develop an awareness of the conversations and ideas of the others, outside their own chosen techniques and areas of interests. Generally, the program of study that they designed can be best understood as sustained, structured dialogue between making and thinking. The ability to explore ideas of form by painting, drawing, making videos, or by combining media required that students develop both technical and critical competencies. Prior to the G8, it can be said that the proficiency levels of even the highest achievers of my students were advancing and expanding. After all, the evaluation scores of portfolios submitted the previous year by the group members were high and several actually had experience in showing their works in local galleries and had subsequently sold some work, but the level of skill, the determination, and even much of the inspirational development came under my management. Even so, the study provided clear evidence, at least to me, of student growth. Prior to the establishment of the G8, developmental pace was much slower than their capabilities. Away from my direction, the G8 more actively developed and engaged in the ability to respond with sophistication to visual phenomena and learned to organize perceptions and

conceptualizations both rationally and intuitively…truths seldom realized under their former curricular guidelines.

The G8 developed competency in studio processes and techniques at a much more efficient pace than before. Moreover, they gained the capability to critically evaluate their own and other's work at a level beyond where they had previously been taught. Writing, research, and daily inquiry with a community of learners became integral components their self-directed programs of study and as a result, they became better equipped for probing the responses of other students and in return refining their own ideas. They engaged others in evaluations of form, content, intent, appropriateness of imagery to the intent, proficiency with materials and techniques, and over all effectiveness.

I had, in the past, wanted my students eventually to have the ability to assess a work on its internal logic, its formal components, and the orchestration of those components in relationship to meaning, and to situate a work in both social and historical contexts. If the truth be known, however, I was the one who provided that information and direction, likely never internalized by the student, and quickly forgotten. Among the values and gifts of the G8 were the lessons of fostering for others understandings of both art and the culture from which it emerged. In that way, they encouraged each other to take up the responsibilities of being an artist. Beyond purely the visual, then, for the first time in their claims as high school art students, they became designers of shaping ideas, experiences, and ethical understandings in a new world of learning.

In short, the G8 was provided an opportunity by which they could understand the context in which they could perceive the complex ways art informed and shaped their world, a setting which previously had never been fully realized. In so doing, a vitalizing didactic process of learning was established firmly grounded in an uncomplicated notion of dialogue.

Exposure of Pedagogical and Curricular Weaknesses

The goal of this study was not to define creativity, but merely to describe, through the perspectives of participants of a research study, what and how the participants of the study perceived and considered as an authentic creative process and completion of a work of art leading to, in their minds, the representation of authentic creativity. Before the study and the impromptu founding of the G8, I judged student art (any and all student work, regardless of the educational level or situation) by its flaws and defects. The G8, judged the art of the others in the group, whether they liked the art or not, by its inspiration, conception, and spirit of the work. Before, I taught students actually to hold to the idea of temporary expression from a predetermined assignment, not from art's truest presentation of nature, or of self.

In the G8, I learned to see student art as a medium through which and by which learners could represent nature, self, imagination, and an idealized image of a truth, and not to merely imitate what had been done by students before. The study of art for the G8 and me became a study, then, of human nature and of self. The G8 began to crystallize emotions into thought, and in turn thought into form. The students

understood, for the first time, the reasons for their art; I, now the unlearned, observed and understood the pleasure of their personal and individual growth as an artist, and the realizations of their own humanness.

Before the study was considered, I mediated as a component and channel of an existing curriculum with no regard to the personal feelings or desires of those for whom the curriculum was shaped. Although I took pride in the fact that I was creative in presenting and actively engaging students in classroom assignments, the program, always under my control, was never really about the students. I had created an atmosphere in which human connectivity was a non-issue and one which revolved around my station. I had designed a human ecology of social isolationists and separatists. I was, tragically, an educational practitioner aligned within a behaviorist archetype. Any revelatory flashes of intelligibility by my students came strictly from a performance and production perspective. The advanced art program I operated seemed well entrenched within an outdated industrial-aged system of production.

Consideration of personal identity, confirmed and realized through others as part of the curriculum, was never my concern. After I withdrew my influence and with it the existing curriculum, the community of the G8 was born. Through and out of the ensuing atmosphere of community of like-minded individuals came an immediate flood of creativity from each member. The transformation of eight students coming out of an atmosphere of isolation and into one of community was a clear example of a prior categorical misconception on my part of controlling an education situation and setting. The pedagogical error prior to the experiment that pointed solely and directly

at the educational situation in which I taught and operated, and perhaps the curriculum itself which eventually was exposed by the study, revealed that a theoretic systemic, fixed, and predictable program of developing merely superficial skill levels ultimately intended to produce genuine and authentically creative products from my students had been a failure in practice. Prior to the study, work completed by my students had been mechanically sound. However, the genuineness of creativity was artificial, and featured little if any authentic personal expression.

Even in a world in which casual determinism is practiced, knowing a prediction can lead to its falsification. Prior to the formation of the G8, I confidently could make accurate predictions about student's behavior and the outcomes of their work only as long as the students involved were not aware of the prediction (Goldman, 1970). During the study, however as I discovered in later interviews, members of the group seemed to be aware of my earlier predictions and the deterministic program under which they had previously studied, not only of what work they would complete and how it would be completed, but the overall appearance of the portfolio itself.

I had not only been predicting the future of the student's work and how it was to be rendered, but the thought processes required to complete the work, as well. Actually, I was shaping their work, their thinking patterns, and, in a way, their future. Student's work, in a manner of speaking, became a subject of my own personal self-fulfillment. Because of past student performance, my predictions brought about its own truth, away from that of the students' work in that forecasts and accounts of favorable results helped generate favorable results for the future…results, however,

not based upon student innovation, spontaneity, self-reliance, decision making, or problem solving abilities within or without the parameters of the curriculum, but results which would be favorable to the methods, the course, and to me (Schick, 2002). One needs only to assume that my students actually believed that I could predict the future. I had an end in view and told the students whatever I thought they needed to hear to achieve an end, to complete exceptional individual works rendered mechanically well and assembled in a comprehensive portfolio of my choosing.

Confronting Determinism

Prior to the G8, my teaching methods were soundly based on the premise that student works would never be completed without specific recommendations. So strong was my influence on student work that merely suggesting an idea for a work brought it about. I thought I had always helped students find their paths to learning, but, in reality, more often than not, I had walked the path for them and had never given them the opportunities to believe or not to believe, to agree or to disagree with what I knew. I never gave them the opportunity for failure, and opportunities for community inquiry were non-existent. Because of the G8, my previous teaching methods and predictive deterministic notions were exposed as merely apparent rather than real. Before the study, the prospect for authentic creativity in their eyes was never presented because my students always followed my lead with predictions, recommendations, leadership, directives, instructive methods, and management of the advanced art program to be real. As a result, any personal control of their artistic

development and learning fell well within the limits of an educational setting in which genuine creative activity was difficult if not impossible.

Had I taken away their free will? For years the final outcomes of their work had been pre-determined. Not until the study did the G8 have the opportunity to make personal decisions and choices. I was not allowing them to walk their own paths of self-discovery and, because of hegemonic teaching methods, I had little knowledge of the creativity, inventiveness, and wisdom of their culture. When given the opportunity to design their program of study, their sudden separation from me was alarming. They broke the vase of their former instruction to create their own without telling me how they would do it. My interjection into their world, and their subsequent expulsion of me from that world exposed my shallowness and weakness as a teacher, my lack of integrity and wisdom. Before the mid-way point of the study, their artistic competence seemed to and probably did exceed my own not only in creativity but in their personal growth and development. As a result of our withdrawal, each from the other now, I became intimidated at times of being their presence, and I felt like an intruder onto their turf. It took that experience, however, to bring me to a place at which I could observe their actions and behaviors as architects of their own construction of learning…and, I became a learner. Was their construction flawed? No doubt. Did they make structural errors in their educational designs? Yes. Did they achieve, ultimately, the course objectives and goals? Well beyond those that they previously had experienced. Were they allowed to fail? Without question, and at times they did fail, but they were always given reassurance

and time to recover. Were they able to practice the art of being an artist, and in so doing did they did complete original, provocative, intellectually challenging works of art? Yes, well beyond my predictions and, for that matter, their own.

Addressing Self-Reliance

What I found most glaring in my pedagogy was my lack of emphasis of students' becoming more self-reliant. Prior to the G8, I had not provided opportunities for self-expression in student work from which inquiry would have become a primary curricular objective. The results of the study suggest that with self-reliance more easily comes self-expression. The study supported the notion that with self-expression comes the development of individuality. While true that the relationship between the G8 and myself was one of cautious watchfulness and their freedom to command their own program of study was very real, we all still recognized the inescapable fact that they were my students and I was their teacher.

Also true was that we were all at a stage of development attempting to distinguish between that which was reality or merely appearance. The reality of the education situation in which we suddenly found ourselves was a combination of progressive, unpredictable, and risk taking experimental management designed to confirm and measure the self-reliance of eight advanced studio art high school students. Against that was a traditional and predictably manageable program of instruction. What came out of the study was my pedagogical death, and from that death came new live and enthusiasm for learning, not only for the G8, but also for myself.

In theory, at least, skill is always a process to an end, and even where fully intentional action is required for the development of a practice or habit, once formed it becomes automatic. Attention passes beyond it and it functions as a reaction to stimulus which supports action (Macmurray, 1999). In artistic wording, one wishing to draw well must draw an adequate amount to establish enough muscle memory, and thus have at disposal the means by which to render well a particular subject in a visual manner with minimum difficulty and a sufficient amount of approval from self or others. Such a skill level can be obtained only through the seeking of such skill through behavior contained within the individual, and as such, whatever skill level is attained is entirely individual. It is, however, not necessarily self-motivated. In many respects when considering education in the visual arts, the acquiring of sufficient mechanical artistic skills is governed by another and more likely than not, for a considerable time, is the intention of the other; such may be the case with the developing artist and their instructor so the artistic behavior of the student may be aligned into the corporate and integral life of other art students. Significantly, the skills and the manner in which skills are acquired usually accommodate the young artist such that they may take their place as a member of a personal community or class, and avoid self-management. Thus, within the goals of the curriculum, the young students not learn merely through instinct and a trial and error process, but are taught (p.58-59).

Portfolio Assessment and Predictability

Although previous studies have sought to determine for a discipline and traditionally based art educational curricula the effects of rhetorical displays or gauges on surface expressions and features, or on the judgments of evaluators, this study made no attempt to quantify comparisons of creativity to various mechanics exhibited in student artwork. No effort was made during the experiment to justify, compare, contrast, measure the consequences, recognize, discriminate, or make a distinction of how creativity is or is not enhanced by mastery of specific artistic mechanical and/or perfunctory processes, or to the depth of knowledge and experience of particular skills needed in rendering works of art.

Because the individual works of art by each member of the G8 were different in content and media, as well as in the individual portfolio methodologies, the prospect of ranking or grading the portfolios in terms of the amount of the immense information the portfolios provided is intriguing. Perhaps the final portfolio evaluation process is understood as, or should be understood as, inconclusive, perhaps even ambiguous and subject to further discussion and possible change. The study certainly suggests further research into the evaluation outcomes of visual art portfolios in comparing skill levels with creative, empirical, and cognitive scholarship.

Several questions are raised when considering the portfolios of the study:

(1) Can the evaluation results of studio art portfolios (or individual works) be predicted or even manipulated through specified mechanical skills centered

instruction? That is, can higher grades and evaluation scores be obtained from a studio art portfolio which yields ability-specific information?

(2) If portfolio evaluation results can be predicted through specified skills centered instruction, how is the artistic intent and motivation to render the work, if either exists, influenced for the one completing the work?

(3) Is the amount of content information contained within a portfolio, or individual work, dependent upon topic and specific instruction given to the student by the instructor, ability level of the student for the specific work to be completed, or is it dependent upon some interaction of these variables?

(4) Can a weariness effect, as well as an energetic effect, be identified in student performance that accounts for contrary levels of authentic creative artistic interest and motivation by this study?

(5) How does a teacher-centered, discipline-based curriculum effect student learning when compared with community based learning?

(6) Is it the desire and objective of teacher-centered, discipline-based art education for all students at all levels to achieve equivalent levels of essential technical skills and knowledge within a similar time frame, and if so, is that concept disingenuous to or does it violate genuine artistic intent?

(7) At what point in their development are student artist presented positive motivation and encouraged to practice, to study the methodologies, and to exercise the intuitive faculties of being an artist? Said another way, at what point of artistic development are students offered the opportunity to practice the art of self-

criticism and to make fearless personal and final judgments based on those judgments?

Can predictable results be obtained through the manipulation of a curriculum by discipline-centered methods (Jones, 2001)? Does a teacher-centered secondary art education programs designed and encouraged to teach towards mastery of skills only can lead to a pedagogical orientation that is itself mechanical, superficial, and low order? Care must be taken that assignments and projects in secondary art not present to students such well prearranged and prepared problems whose solution or end result is already suggested or required in its presentation. Such behaviorist tasks for the students would diminish the value of a constructed response arrangement relating more closely to disordered and unpredictable problems students encounter outside the educational setting (Frederiksen, 1984). Such discipline and skills oriented teaching seems to violate the actual spirit and idealism of the subject. Further, assignments should be presented and formatted to promote interaction with others.

The curricular implications of the study's findings should be considered in light of two defining features of the study. First, the focus was not on the completed portfolio, although each member participating in the experiment was requested to complete a comprehensive portfolio, which all members of the G8 accomplished. Nor was the focus of the study on the individual works completed by the members of the group. The G8 already had accomplished the task of demonstrating their mastery of essential skills prior to the experiment. A primary focus of the study addressed the issues of artistic intent, artistic ownership of the work, and their interpretation of

authentic creativity. Second, the G8 was given the opportunity to design its own program of study which included their own original statements of purpose and rationale separate from that of the formal format of the established curriculum and with no regard to the predictive expectations, evaluations and suggestions of the teacher. Therefore, the study's findings may have limited generalizability in which the purpose of completing a body of work is strictly analytical and mechanical skills oriented. For example, whereas the accomplished mechanical skill levels varied among the group, and some members were more proficient in particular media and methods than others. All portfolios, each different in content and media unique to the individual student artist who assembled the work, appeared to me to be at a high level of artistic proficiency. One could conclude with proper analysis that proficiency of mechanical artistic skills may or may not be a good predictor of intrinsic artistic and personal aesthetic interest in individual work, but is probably an excellent predictor of a high evaluation for a comprehensive body of work with a disciplined based teacher centered approach to learning.

Individualized expression and creativity, however professionally rendered with little regard of reflecting traditional elements of art and principles of design on the other hand, probably is not necessarily a good predictor for a high evaluation from a teacher-centered curriculum. A holistically appraised portfolio from an accepted program of instruction could be a very poor diagnostic tool for analyzing artistic talent in secondary art education. Critically appraised body of work developed and evaluated locally may be a very useful diagnostic tool for assessing the artistic

condition of the student, one which could render a more intrinsic and holistic perception of the student's understanding of artistic intent, aesthetic interests, and perceptiveness.

Authentic Creativity

As noted before, the purpose of this study was not to define creativity. In fact, creativity seems to defy quantification. Something as ethereal and imponderably mysterious as creativity practically resists definition and is personally well beyond the parameters of my own explanatory abilities. This study described the events and records the feelings of eight high school students and myself in association with creativity only after allowing those students the freedom of addressing creativity on their own terms, far and away from the predictable and standardized format in which they were previously associated. As a result, despite the difficulty one might encounter in defining creativity, the study, at least, provided for the students and me a clearer understanding and the importance of its personal applications for those who study and work in the field of art.

Before the study when the G8 operated under systemic procedures initiated by me, a question arose about authentic creativity. The study suggested that participation in the creative process is essential to knowing the authenticity of the creative process, and at least for the G8, that understanding includes a perception that creativity has a purpose, as well as and an acceptance of its purpose, a concept difficult to comprehend when merely duplicating or imitating what others have done before. In

the minds of individual members in the group, while confirmation of creativity may have rested in the opinions of others, the authentication and validity of creativity began with the individual.

During the study, each member the group came to a place of personal transport to view and then reengage the individual content and unique methodologies of their work. They where being intrinsically moved, well beyond their previous experiences of superficially manipulating elements of art and principles of design. The study suggests that they were presented and established an atmosphere and environment in which addressing creativity in an authentic manner involved an internal struggle, and a thus, for them, provided essentially a personal, inherent meaning for words like creative, personal expression, and community. For a variety of reasons, they had been frustrated in their previous attempts at understanding and rendering works that they would qualify as authentically creative by working in a poverty-enhanced system that inhibited their personal creative growth (Callahan, 1962).

With the formation of the G8, an environment was established which engendered an abundance of creative characteristics. The G8 individuals provided within their group the power to lift members out of what one might describe as a human ecology of creative despair and into one of resolve. The idea of forming a community of inquiry to address authentic creativity was not part of the initial agreement for the study; it just happened. The community in turn helped each member address issues in their respective areas of concentration that dealt with sensitive and deeply human topics. Moreover, for the first time in their artistic career as a student, they were not

concerned with their grades, but rather a concern that authentic creativity involved the matter of self-expression and the experiences of addressing those human expressions with others in a community of inquiry. An internal shift in their approach to their art had created an external shift in their work. Before the study, I had required students to operate primarily under a system modernistic system of instruction with an emphasis of outward appearances and behavior, analyzing skills and knowledge of their use of particular elements and principles of art. Where the G8 replaced that emphasis through individual works with little or no regard to my approval. Said another way, they placed their own perspective of acceptance what was valid and authentic ahead of mine to what was personally internal and unique to them.

The lesson of the study was addressing the issue of creativity at the source, rather than downstream. To understand how they perceived the concept of genuine creativeness, the G8 taught me that I had to go upstream to their beliefs and behavior, to their thoughts and to their human interactions, instead of trying to superficially change their emotions or their habits with manipulative and mechanical projects (Grayson, 1999).

Student Perspectives on Personal Credibility

To say the G8 wanted personal input into their artistic development would be understated. Once the experiment began, their departure from my influence came abruptly. I felt isolated and irrelevant as an educator. It was an early realization of

what I had put them through and what they had tolerated in the superficial motions of mechanical development. They were starved for substance, but I had kept them from artistic experimentation. It seemed to be a basic human need to which I had given little attention. The idea of trusting them enough to truly serve as a teacher and guidance mentor, to permit them the experience of ownership and to allow them to experience the feeling of being whole, to give them something to discuss among themselves and to share with others the curricular nutrition from which they could gain energy was severely lacking in their curriculum before the experiment.

I soon realized that with the study I had given them the vehicle of choice, which enabled diverse individuals to traverse and chart their own courses, eventually enabling them to share their strengths, not constantly exposing their weaknesses as before. The study was not about my service to them as a teacher, however, or even the making of rewarding experiences, although that certainly happened. It was more about that which is fundamental to human development, more primal. What the G8 did is what the group (or culture) wanted to do instinctively, to enable itself and to make themselves creditable.

The G8 designed a new archetype of artistic development by using their resources to help and expand the curriculum. By investing in personal imagination, invention, and faith they build a curriculum that surpassed the superficial mechanical and teacher controlled aspect of a disciplined-based teacher-controlled program of study. To be sure, I had always wanted an educational setting that enabled students to use the materials and skills they had already mastered in unique ways and I had always

sought possibilities for students to discover new and unique understandings of their humanness.

The Mysteries of Their Work

Eventually, their work was about the subjective nature of personal experience, the desire to break out of the self, and to know and make sense of the physically manifest world around them. By the mid-point of the experiment it became clear that the characteristics of designing their own programs of study had personal benefits to each member of the G8. By having the opportunity to express on their own terms the gap between reality and how they transcended it, the students were able for the first time in their young artistic careers practice the processes of being artists.

During the experiment, I felt that while the G8 made decisions about the creative methodologies concerning their work, they were operating like a pinhole camera with no lens or viewfinder. Like the photographs of such a camera, their translated ideas and visions almost always seemed dreamlike. The images they rendered became like movie stills rather than complete stories, were unresolved, and verged on the supernatural, were receding and hazy, and were enigmatic to the point of being distressing, full of anxiety, or being captivated by a fantasy. Their worked evoked moody and open-ended narratives about society, women, nature, and moral messages.

By the end of the experiment their work became metaphors for, but not direct representations of specific places, people, or things. To a certain extent, the works existed within the realm of ambiguity meant to trigger memory and reminiscence

based on personal experiences with associations made to what is seen, felt, or heard. In all, their work exhibited a sophistication far beyond what I had expected or had seen under former directions of instruction.

With the removal from my having direct control of what they rendered, their individual works generated a life of their own, at times, perhaps, indicating a stronger image than the corresponding artistic ability of the student who rendered it. In one sense their work was openly revelatory; in another, it was a shelter, a sort of protected display case. The G8 had been given the primary source of power to make art in which they as individuals represented the first cause of what they rendered. They were courageous enough to take risks and expose themselves to possible ridicule, to fully raise a host of important issues in the relationships between art and their life experiences. Their work became a representation of the joys, fears, achievements, failures, and risks taken in their own life experiences. Little if any of the student work completed before the experiment revealed any degree of anxiety, or excitement of the mysteries of self. Student work had been work mostly displays of ordinary activity. I came to fully realize and understand even in young artists that with the recognition of their imaginations, visions and ideas come self-realization (Montuori, 1996), thus in its impact is its proof that in their creations began the process of completing themselves; and in so doing, they realized an authenticity of creativity. They came to realize that their voices were as valuable as any.

Bending the Curriculum to Students' Needs

Handing the reins of a program of study to the G8 students disrupted my instructional practice. My daily routine was disrupted. At the beginning of the experiment I felt I was losing control of my classroom, and my daily plans began to unravel from the smallest events. The G8 control of their own study programs began a series of unchangeable and unpredictable events, spiraling upward in a curricular awareness of new possibilities and expansion of a program that the G8 had seen as limiting, predictable, and one in which they were saturated.

The G8 saw the curriculum before the study as one not addressing their social needs trying to get them to fit some sort of a schematic. For them the curriculum represented an emblematic structure that became a fiction, which did not fit well to their culture. Their unpredictable culture was being situated into an existing curriculum based on predictability.

> "Our generation is one which is time-based. Before the G8, we were dealing with and given ideas which were pre-structured…already built and assembled before we ever put brush to canvas. Before, we were the ones having to once again integrate into the structure. We saw ourselves, I saw myself, as becoming a voice outside the structure, out of nowhere."
>
> -Stella Ward

My teaching became more serendipitous than mechanical during the study. The spontaneous interaction between the students and myself created an ecology of human behavior where chance superseded a pre-designed blueprint. I learned that the vision, idealism, excitement, empathy and knowledge that I once thought was

enough to bring to the classroom as a good teacher was not enough to fully engage my students. At least during this experiment and experience, a newfound awareness of removing myself from a teacher-controlled pedagogical stance and into a position as a learner, provided more constructive educational experiences for me than I had previously known. It was not until then that I discerned and experienced an intelligibility of my teaching. In this new educational situation, I was able to establish an authentic dialogue with the students, participating in daily movements in knowledge, understanding and discovery. If a successful educational setting based on the vitality of a modified curriculum, belief in pedagogical experimentation, and the importance of helping students to think independently, critically, and to promote inquiry, then students should do better in their areas of interests if they were able to practice doing so.

In one sense the participants were improvising; in another, they were working a plan of their own envisage. The G8 seemed circuitous with energy in helping each other transfer their feelings, ideas, and visions into visual representations. As the experiment progressed, however, the temperament of the students became more erratic and deteriorated with each passing month. Attendance was inconsistent and unreliable, and their dispositions became brash and impatient. I became aware of their mental exhaustion. For many during the experiment, days would go by without activity, and I had fears that they would not or could continue with their work.

Ethnology, however, like it is sometimes with discovery, is an invasive and unethical penetrative act. In one sense, I did not want to interfere with an opportunity

to witness and observe this empirical study. I wanted to see their work with a sense of urgency. I had only so much time within which to study the G8 and I admonished them weekly to use their time wisely. At the completion of the study, I understood that what I really wanted during the study is as much data as I could gather. In so doing, I believe that at times the ethnographic researcher of education part of me violated the pedagogical educator part of me, and my hegemonic teaching tendencies of before re-surfaced wearing a disguise as an observer/researcher.

Artistic productivity was well beyond others in their age group in the other advanced art classes. I had a very clear sense they were always working under a notion of fear that the experiment would be cancelled and where I once incorrectly perceived that idea as ingenious motivation causing high productivity, I also had a sense of their vulnerability. I reassured them often that while I was recording their activities, they were free to implement and plan their schedule and that I would not interfere with their activities.

Their old student selves died with my old teacher self. Their new student selves lived in their new analyses of me. With the death of my old hegemonic pedagogy, came new life for the G8. In their new life came mine. Allowing the curriculum to meet the needs of my students met my own pedagogical needs, as well. In finding their way, I found mine. The unpredictable culture of the G8 adjusted to an unpredictable curriculum, one that ran counter to the standardized ideology they had known before.

While it is true that I wanted them to feel comfortable in being alone with themselves with their creative process and with themselves to find feelings of authenticity and that which was lasting. I wanted them to set aside the superficiality of the glitz of their pop culture and to search for an understanding of that which is deeper and substantially more closely associated with their life experiences. It is also true that I wanted them to experience the reward of completing themselves through their art; I also wanted them to be romantics, and to walk through and share their amazing journeys adventures with others. The G8 came to represent a group through which students were able to find themselves individually. The had formed a community in which they found the strength to risk visually displaying their feelings, and in finding themselves they were able to challenge themselves.

At the completion of the experiment, I was obliged to acknowledge curricular gaps within the previous educational setting, which included concerns and a student driven need to address the issue of creativity. Further, the study revealed a direct correlation of addressing creativity and the emergent unexpected themes concerning a spontaneous establishment of a learning community; an unpredictable and indeterministic pattern of learning developed the participants of the study; and, an undeniable materialization, influence, and developmental didactic component of high self-esteem exhibited by the participants of the study. The study of the G8 was not one that advocated a dismantling of an existing curriculum. It was about recognition by the participants of the study, members of a culture the study demonstrated as

complex and unpredictable not fitting into an existing curriculum distinguished by its traditionalist predictability.

The study illustrated the desertion by the G8 from an industrial age educational format, one in which students reported directly to the teacher (authority figure) and adopted a system in which all members of the community, which included both the learners and the teacher, operated on common ground at a level in which status or stratification became a non-issue. Dewey's conception of experience-based practical learning forming habits of inquiry and co-operation falls easily in line with the practices of the G8.

Emergence of Self-Esteem

> Nothing is more painful to the human mind than, after the
> feelings have been worked up by a quick succession of events,
> the dead calmness of inaction…deprives the soul both of hope and fear.
> -Mary Shelley

By the completion of the study the members of the group exhibited an outwardly and observable higher level of self-esteem. Their higher self-esteem seemed to give the group a stability and a steadiness to not only address the difficulties of openly expressing the deep personal meanings displayed in their work, but to the sudden changes (discontinuity) which accompany the daily activities of any high school art student, a concept worthy of further exploration and, perhaps, a crucial component for workable educational settings in which gifted students can experience optimal learning. It was a concept in which I had, for the first time, a new appreciation. The

importance of a dynamic quality, it seems, is associated with self-esteem as a vital ingredient necessary for affective learning.

The study suggests that self-esteem is an effect rather than cause of achievement. The G8 saw for themselves the value of their studies by focusing directly on developing abilities that justified a sense of confidence which was absent before the experiment. It was my observation that their surest route to feeling secure in themselves was brought about by their self-improvement, self-development, new responsibilities, and the rewards gained from completing a long and difficult project. Conditions contributing to the development of high self-esteem included classroom environment, discipline and responsibility, encouragement, self-acceptance, creating a curricular heritage, teacher-student interaction, self-evaluation, self-respect, communication skills, and the ability to learn on one's own.

The study suggested that self-esteem is highly correlated with student success. Self-esteem for the G8 flourished in an educational setting in which they felt they belonged to an important group, where individual membership is recognized and acknowledged, and one in which they felt a sense of ownership.

The G8 identified or illuminated a kind of restructuring of an outdated educational system for themselves, which in turn allowed for and encouraged the kind of school environment and personal interactions needed to promote self-esteem. Their acceptance of more responsibility accounted for desired outcomes. Moreover, the experiment promoted an idea that captured students, those mobile with a program of study willingly allowing a teacher to direct learning where individual innovation is

overshadowed by the course, having the inability or are being denied an opportunity to pursue their own line of thinking, may impede the beneficial formation of self-esteem (Shore, 2001).

I had withdrawn from them. They had withdrawn from me. Together, then, we returned to each other, but under different circumstances, which enabled them to do work on their own. The students learned to do for themselves. They began practicing being artists, a phase of self-assertion, self-consciousness, and self-development in opposition of me.

The breaking of the dependences from my predictable program to one in which the members of the group became their own agents was a necessary stage of growth. They all had the capacity and opportunity to act upon, respond to, and render their own expressions, which in itself signified that which they so badly needed - freedom and choice. They were compelled to distinguish between what was seen by them as unreal (my unauthentic program) and real (their authentic program), then to choose and finally to act (they all completed the portfolio). Their completed work, methodologies and the intent of placing the work in a position of being evaluated, was clearly an indicator that they had accepted themselves as legitimate and viable. Their works became indicators of being committed to developing their abilities, which could only have been realized with an awareness of their talents (Feldhusen, 2003).

In actuality, as a result of their challenging educational experiences within the study, each member of the G8 came to a better understanding of their talents,

recognizing the personal courage and daring to visually display and outwardly reveal their most inner notions of truth, regardless of how controversial. They eventually accomplished what they once considered well beyond their abilities and they focused and developed on not only personal interests but accepted and understood those of others (Feldhusen, 2003). The study suggests that the earlier indications and identification of talent for the G8 came into full fruition only under fitting educational conditions which allowed for their emergence as practicing young thinkers, explorers, and artists…conditions which were not predictable and pre-deterministic, and conditions that included human interaction and communicative inquiry.

Conclusion

Art is a complex, culturally loaded act. It does more than merely visually describe concrete objects or events. While much art is representational, it also is concerned with the response of the viewer and the artist, feelings and ideas, and personal elements of life experience. Art asks us to participate in a communication process. In so doing, it may be used to transform the viewer, to communicate ideas, and to provide deeper and wider frames of reference. Art gives insight and shape to human experience, helping to inform our responses and actions. Art can provide an experience or spirit of communion between the artist, the work itself, and the audience when looking at a painting, listening to a particular symphony, or attending a dramatic production. That the audience or viewer voluntarily is placed in a position of acceptance to what they are attending, allowing a reception of a message of the

artist, I believe, can be at least closely associated with a spiritual experience. Thus, art can be used to enlighten and persuade in different ways and may be directed at different audiences. In recent years, these moments of illumination have become more open (perhaps confusing) finding viewers of contemporary art challenged, beyond the very nature of art itself, to question and think about such things as morals, values, and other social issues (Wolcott, 1997).

In this respect, as educators we need to design curricula focused on helping students develop their abilities both to create and to understand meaning in their own works of art and in that of others. We need to provide students with the skills and abilities necessary to interpret, analyze, and evaluate art. At some point in their artistic educational experience, students should be allowed to practice being artists. Educators need to make art more relevant to students - that is, we must strive to bring the art world and the student's world together for better understanding. Contemporary art can, with the help of knowledgeable art educators, assist students in understanding our changing society. Likewise, students can provide an understanding of the culture from which they come through their art to their teachers.

If strength is the outcome of need, it stands to reason that students at any level can become better learners and intellectually stronger while adapting to new educational settings. The G8, faced with the insecurity of having a directive instructional format removed from their learning environment, realized the struggle of relying on their inventiveness, intelligence, failures, and vigor to make necessary and appropriate adaptations for curricular survival on their own. For the first time in their artistic

educational experience they faced an adversity of having to supply their own rational to meet curricular goals and objectives with personal decisions apart from those of an instructor while facing the pressure and scrutiny of others. In so doing, they were able to grasp a pragmatic approach of practicing artistic behavior. For the G8, adversity and freedom, conditions under which the intellectually active and strong thrive put a premium upon a faithful association of the others in the group in the same condition, and reinforced their own self-reliance, vitality, patience, and decision. Every member of the group took pride in their own creative strengths, became energetic, and used their own abundant intellectual powers to alter their learning conditions. Their processes of learning to facilitate intellectual flexibility, versatility, adaptability, and resourcefulness were reimbursement for change, risk, and difficulty.

Does intellectual growth exist where there is no change, or challenge, or need of change? Prior to the study, was the teacher-controlled environment in which I managed inflicting educational injury to the human intellect by not providing the challenges, the un-comfort, the insecurities, and un-resolved questions for learners to figure out? Is it true that an absence of maximizing intellectual growth existed in my classroom because I offered little change or no need of change or adjustment in their educational environment? Had I made the educational setting in which students operated so comfortable that their intellect was not properly exercised? The G8 supported a concept that learners vigorously partaking in activities promoting intellectual growth are better equipped to meet a variety of needs and opportunities (Wells, 1895).

This study proposes that the positivist teaching of traditional discipline oriented teaching is associated with a scientific approach of mechanical mastery distinct and separate from metaphysical speculation and ideas about the meaning of life, all of which, ironically, comes naturally and is expressly a major part of the visual arts field of study. The G8 taught the lesson that an unpredictable methodological approach to art yielded the unpredictable but more naturally and realistic view of their lives. I had always wanted them to understand the inherent value of art. Prior to the study, I had only taught them fact. They understood value and wanted to practice the unknown and uncertainty of creativity to learn the facts.

The revelatory insights emerging from the study of the G8 underscored the value of choice and unpredictability, not a system of standardization. Instead, the G8 updated the curriculum to match their needs. In so doing, the curriculum became current, was relevant for each member, had personal meaning, and provided a channel of emotional attachment. With the formation of the G8 came diversity, bringing the curriculum to life.

What is essential about the formation of the G8 is the not too idealistic notion that the dialogue they established is reproducible in almost all times and places. John Dewey (1902) taught us that the only danger confronting us is being closed to the emergent, the new, and the manifestations of progress. In my observations of the G8, I found myself reflecting on what they should learn to be educated, and reconsidered for myself as well, the concept of human fulfillment. In disciplined based programs emphasizing areas of specialization, specified bits of information, and the mastery of

skills, we can avoid such speculation. In the experiment, the questions that I faced as an educator were extraordinarily complex for their simplicity, the same ones, by the way, which confronted the individual members of the G8: What, now, is to be taught and how will it be taught? What is to be learned? The answers during the experiment or even at its conclusion were never clearly evident to me, but even in the attempt to answer the questions is a teaching and learning event. Was it irresponsible and immature, or perhaps arrogant and too idealistic on my part as an experienced educator to even consider clinging to a belief that this group of high school students, irregardless of their giftedness, could or would, once removed from my pervasiveness, develop freely a comprehensive program of study in a field recognized by many for its deliberate ambiguity? Was it too authoritarian to impose, as I had done before, my point of view onto the student? If the response is to provide an environment for learning then we must readdress some of the original questions. Which environment? Either I provide an atmosphere in which an emphasis for manual training is placed, or an atmosphere in which students can practice being artists and be allowed to fail. Said another way, I provide and promote and design an educational situation deemed behaviorist and traditional, embracing a system of standardization, one teacher-centered and conventionally disciplined, or I maintain and support one that embraces a constructivist format and is progressive. When the traditional does not provide the opportunity for intellectual inquiry, should it be replaced by that which does? Does the fundamental, standardized and mechanical conformity advanced by a teacher-centered and discipline oriented curriculum require

one forfeit to the program an opportunity for self-expression with such thoroughness that the imperfect, but nevertheless still clear, conveyance of humanness is lost? If so, is not the young artist's opportunity to search for truth lost, as well?

It's not that the G8 did not care about the curriculum. Journal entries clearly indicated that they did. At least at the beginning of the experiment, I think the group took a moderate amount of pride in creating their own programs of study. The students, as evidenced by the study, sought encounters with truth, which the prior curriculum had not facilitated in that pursuit. Plus, the evocative and influential community of learners that formed soon after the study commenced was highly instrumental in providing individual motivation for seeking truth. The G8, however, had only a minor concern for the curriculum. They sought truth, and genuinely authentic creativity. Ultimately, because they abandoned their own programs (time simply became an inhibiting factor for the thorough unfolding of their syllabi) the curriculum became an after thought to that of finding their own truths and their own humanness within their work. The G8 eventually had this intrinsic desire to, not only seek, but experiment with their truths. They needed and eventually designed a curriculum that would fit them.

Has fundamentalism, regardless of its field of study and accepted traditional, mechanical and disciplined worth, provided enough direction find or further an understanding of what it means to be more human? Is fundamentalism when broken down into its most basic function, about control? Is fundamentalism about engineering the student to fit the curriculum?

For this study, my stance as an educator needed to embrace an identity of something other than that of monitor. Was it possible to have a noninterventionist and tolerant system of learning in which students could explore the mysteries of being an artist, and were those students, then, allowed the opportunities to practice the art of being an artist? The study of the G8 supports the notion that the potential crudeness, improprieties, and unseemliness of the real world of those practicing art be permitted to not only invade, but prosper and thrive within that kind of environment. Otherwise, a more unsympathetic requirement on the student, one given by an overly no-nonsense and authoritative instructor, placing demands of restricting specialized disciplines from an educational philosophy of corporate and unifying thought may exist (Bloom, 1987).

The G8's quest for truth became one of dialogue. While it is true their individual works were completed alone in the work areas they created for themselves sometimes several days without the intervention of others, I never, from the moment the experiment began, had the sense that they worked independently. I nervously, cautiously, anxiously, apprehensively had given them instant freedom to chart their own plans, always hoping, but tentative in my belief that learning would even occur. The students were free to gather and speak and work at their own will. Not one day, however, did they disassociate themselves or their work from each other. They would (me included, because eventually I was included into their community) think together, disagree together, fail together, share together, grow together and be that which artists are together. Our common concerns, uncertainties notwithstanding,

linked us together and underscored our realization that high school can, in particular places at particular moments, be about intellectual inquiry after all. Our educational experiences became more liberal, not about specialization with logical and definitive conclusions. Our past failures, theirs and mine we now realized, came as a result of our not thinking as one. Eventually, disunited became united; predictability became indeterministic and unpredictable; with unpredictability came inquiry. They became We; with We came dialogue; with dialogue came discourse and exchange; and, with dialogue came education, a naturally human activity.

The value in the study of the Group of Eight lies in the understanding that they identified and defined that which I wanted them to become…artists and learners actively engaged in the making of art. The type of personality that prospers as an artist at any given time is the product of many different factors. Skill, determination, and inspiration, but these essential qualities are never enough in themselves. It is simple truth that most artists reflect their own times…a simple truth that the G8 were not allowed to express before the experiment. The outstanding artist has the ability to capture the imagination of others, even in future generations and say something of direct relevance to them. Even in the world outside the educational setting, it is a rare occurrence, and is possible only if the artist is working out of the deepest personal conviction with a wish to experiment with the truth of their times and themselves, revealing something more than skill with the intention to do more than impress or please someone else or a specific audience (Cumming, 1998). The study exposed the timelessness and universality of the work of the exceptional young artists existing

because they had something exceptional to say, and they were allowed to say it. The study provided evidence for an understanding that for those involved in the experiment, the work completed during the research was not an end in itself but a means of trying to reach fundamental human truths.

APPENDIX A

CONSENT LETTER

Student Directorship of Visual Arts Portfolio

Dear Parent/Student:

You are invited to participate in a research study concerning student development of a visual arts portfolio for eight advanced studio art students currently enrolled at James Bowie High School in Austin, Texas. The study will be conducted during the Spring Semester 2002 at Bowie High School. Kenneth R. Austin, visual arts instructor at Bowie High School and doctoral student at The University of Texas at Austin will conduct the study, which will be supervised by Professor Mary S. Black, Dept. of Curriculum and Instruction, The University of Texas at Austin.

If you agree to participate, information will be collected from interviews, student classroom journals, and actual artwork. Mr. Austin is interested in the student's directorship and development of their own personal visual arts portfolios as compared to teacher led directorship of the portfolios. Also, there is interest in the roles that peers may play in the development of the portfolios.

All information gained from this study will remain confidential, and no student or family names will be used. Students are not obligated to answer every question during the interviews. Interviews will be recorded by note taking only, and those notes will be kept in a locked file in Mr. Austin's office at Bowie High School. Students may receive a copy of the interview notes if they wish. Students are also free to discontinue participation in the study at any time by simply informing Mr. Austin of their decision. Your choice to participate or not in no way compromises the student/teacher classroom relationship, your grades, and your relationship with James Bowie High School or The University of Texas at Austin. No compensation will be given for this study.

By signing this form and returning it to Mr. Austin, you are giving your consent to participate. You may keep a copy of this letter for your files. If you have any questions about the study at any time, please contact Mr. Austin at 512-841-4146 or kenaustin@dotplanet.com, James Bowie High School, 4103 W. Slaughter Lane, Austin, TX 78749. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Clarke A. Burnham, Ph.D., Chair, The University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, 512-232-4183.

Parent/Guardian or 18 yr old student Telephone # Date

_____

Name of Student

_____ _____

Signature of Minor Student "I assent to be in this study" Date

APPENDIX B
REPRESENTATIVE WORKS PRIOR TO STUDY

Stephanie Wonder –
observation study

Elizabeth Bennet –
Old Masters study

Stella Ward –
Observational study

Stephanie Wonder –
3-D portrait study

Stella Ward –
figure study

Sophie Stephens –
textile design study

Trip Monroe -
Figure study

Nic Phan –
observational study

Trip Monroe –
design study

Nic Phan -
figure study

Nic Phan –
observational study

Margie Ferrantti –
figure study

APPENDIX C

ADDITIONAL WORKS FROM PARTICIPANTS DURING THE STUDY

Stella Ward
Tempera on paper

Stella Ward
Tempera on paper

Stella Ward
Acrylic on paper

Stella Ward
colored pencil on paper

Stella Ward
Digital Photography

Stella Ward
Mixed-media

Stella Ward
Oil on hardboard

Stella Ward
Self-portrait

Stephanie Wonder
Acrylic on hardboard

Stephanie Wonder
Oil on canvas

Stephanie Wonder
Digital photgraph

Elizabeth Bennet
Digital photograph

Sophie Stephens
Mixed-media

Elizabeth Bennet
Mixed-media

Elizabeth Bennet
Oil on canvas

Sophie Stephens
Mixed-media

Elizabeth Felicia
Digital photograph

Sophie Stephens
Mixed-media

Stella Ward
Digital photograph

Elizabeth Felicia
Digital photograph

Margie Ferrantti
Mixed-media

Stella Ward
Digital Photograph

Stephanie Wonder
Acrylic on canvas

Margie Ferrantti
Collage

Elizabeth Bennett
Mixed-media on canvas

Stella Ward
Oil on Canvas

APPENDIX D

RESEARCH ART STUDIO SETTING

Stephanie Wonder in inner art studio

Inner art studio – Room H-107

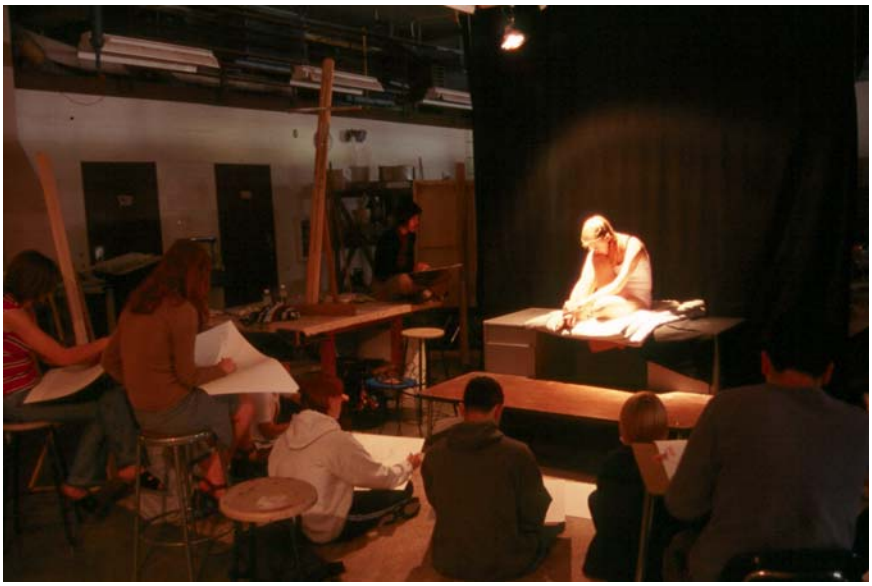


Figure study session in painting studio

Elizabeth Bennet and Trip Monroe in painting studio

Stephanie Wonder in painting studio

Stella Ward in painting studio

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VITA

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